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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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QUOTE of THE DAY

"Modi ji, you have one more chance. If you truly want to improve your anti-women image, accept the Congress's demand for reservation for women in the current 543 seats. This law should be implemented in the upcoming monsoon session, and women from backward classes should also receive a 1/3 share

—CONGRESS' CHALLENGE TO PM MODI

Don: Will drop bombs if deal not reached

No sign of talks as ceasefire set to end on Wednesday

Police officers stand guard at a checkpoint to ensure security ahead of negotiations between the US and Iran in Pakistan's Islamabad —PTI

WASHINGTON/ ISLAMABAD, 21 APR

US President Donald Trump on Tuesday threatened to start bombing Iran if they do not agree to a deal before the two-week ceasefire expires on Wednesday, even as Pakistan urged the two sides to extend the truce and give diplomacy a chance.

Trump has indicated that his team of negotiators could reach Islamabad soon. The New York Post reported that US Vice President JD Vance would arrive in Pakistan later on Tuesday – but there was no confirmation at the time of publishing. However, Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar on Tuesday evening said his country was still waiting for a formal response from Iran. Iranian officials said that they do not negotiate under "shadow threats". Yet, Trump told CNBC's 'Squawk Box' that Iran agreed to negotiate.

"If they make a deal, they can make themselves into a strong nation again," he added.

If the ceasefire ends without an agreement, he said he is prepared to resume bombing "because that's a better attitude to go in with". The previous round of negotiations broke down in Iran without a deal, with US Vice President Vance blaming Iran for not making concessions on its nuclear programme. With the Strait of Hormuz remaining closed, the ceasefire drawing to a close and over 5,000 people already killed in over a month of the war, it remains to be seen if a both sides can hash out their difference. —*Agencies*

>>>More on Pages 5, 6 & 7

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-53

Court orders FIR against HM for betting remark

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

A court in Bengaluru has ordered the registration of an FIR against Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara over an alleged betting remark made during a kabaddi match, sources said on Tuesday.

The 42nd Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate directed police to initiate a probe following a private complaint filed by HR Nagabhushan. The court also instructed Kodigehalli police in Tumakuru to conduct a detailed investigation.

According to the complaint, the minister, during a recent state-level pre-university kabaddi tournament in Tumakuru, remarked after the final that he had "lost Rs 500" after placing a bet with the Deputy Commissioner on the outcome. In the match, Dakshina Kannada defeated Vijayapura 36–26 in the boys' final.

Though the comment was made in a lighter vein, it drew criticism, with questions raised over the propriety of such remarks by a senior public office-holder. Nagabhushan argued that the statement amounted to an admission of gambling, an illegal act, and warranted legal action, particularly after local police allegedly declined to act on his earlier complaint citing lack of material. In his defence, Parameshwara said the remark was a "light-hearted" comment made during a sporting event, adding that unnecessary controversy was being created. —

Shutdown, fresh clashes paralyse Manipur again

IMPHAL, 21 APRIL

Protesters from two tribal communities clashed on the borders of Senapati and its adjacent Kangpokpi districts of Manipur on Tuesday over a shutdown called by a civil society organisation, leading to tension in the area.

Local police's attempts to clear a roadblock set up by Naga volunteers to enforce a three-day shutdown by the United Naga Council to protest the 18 April killing of two persons in Ukhrul district sparked the clash, officials said.

The situation turned tense after Changoubung Kuki villagers became involved, leading to stone pelting between the two sides. "A few rounds were fired during the commotion. However, it is not clear who did it," the official said.

The three-day shutdown called by UNC on 20 April mid-night paralysed normal life in all Naga-inhabited areas of the state, including Ukhrul, Kamjong, Senapati, Noney and Tamenglong.

Meanwhile, people protesting the death of two children in a recent bomb blast in Manipur clashed with security forces during a torch rally in the state capital Imphal, police said.

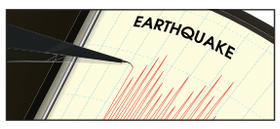
The seven-km-long torch rally was brought out from Mayai Lambi to Keishamthong in Imphal West district on Monday night, but the participants turned violent and clashed with the security forces, a police officer said.

In another incident, one person sustained bullet wounds after security forces allegedly opened fire when a mob advanced towards the venue of Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh's programme in Thoubal district on Tuesday, police said. Officials said the chief minister later travelled to a nearby central force camp and returned to Imphal by helicopter. —*PTI*

Protesters blocked a road in Thoubal on Tuesday ahead of an inauguration programme of a BDO office by CM Yumnam Singh —PTI

'We are suffering for 3 years, why is the country silent?'

As the country celebrates the success of 'Dhurandhar', a young protester in violence-hit Manipur said the nation was ignoring the state's suffering, questioning the Centre's silence. "We are suffering for three years. Our youth life, our student life has been destroyed. Why are you silent?" he said, adding that while the country is busy celebrating, "citizens in Manipur have been left unprotected". Calling for action against "terrorists", he said similar incidents in Uttar Pradesh or Delhi would have drawn a stronger response. Referring to 7 April attack in Tronglaobi that killed two kids, he asked if such incidents could be termed "women empowerment".



5.2-magnitude quake jolts Manipur

IMPHAL/SHILLONG, 21 APRIL

Manipur was struck by an earthquake of 5.2 magnitude on Tuesday morning, officials said. The quake occurred at 5.59 am with its epicentre located in Kamjong district, they added. Tremors were felt in neighbouring Ukhrul district and state capital Imphal, and even Meghalaya but no casualty or damage has been reported so far. —*PTI*

Pakistan extends airspace closure for India till 24 May

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Pakistan on Tuesday extended the closure of its airspace for Indian aircraft until 24 May, marking over a year of restrictions. Following the Pahalgam terror attack last year that killed 26 people, India and Pakistan closed their airspaces. Pakistan has kept its airspace closed for Indian planes since 24 April, 2025, and Indian aircraft have been barred from Pakistani airspace since 30April last year. According to a NOTAM issued by the Pakistan Airport Authority, the airspace is unavailable for Indian registered aircraft and Indian-operated or leased aircraft, including military flights. The ban runs from 21 April until 2359 hours (UTC) on 23 May, or 0530 hrs (IST) on 24May . India has also extended its ban on Pakistani aircraft using its airspace until 24 April and may prolong it further. —*PTI*

Academician Madhu Kishwar booked for post

CHANDIGARH, 21 APRIL

Academician Madhu Kishwar has been booked following a complaint from a Chandigarh resident over allegedly circulating forged and misleading content on social media. An FIR has been lodged against Kishwar and other users under sections including 196 (acts promoting enmity), 336 (forgery), and 356 (criminal defamation), along with the IT Act at Police Station Sector-26. The complaint, filed on 19 April alleges that forged posts and video clips with obscene content misidentified the person in the video. The complainant claimed it was a deliberate act to damage reputation and disturb peace. The video, shared from a woman's social media account, shows her husband. Kishwar stated on X that police visited her late Monday to serve her notice, but she insisted they come in the morning, citing law restrictions. —*PTI*

13 dead as blast rips through fireworks unit in Kerala

THRISSUR, 21 APRIL

Firefighters douse a blaze after a fire broke out at a fireworks manufacturing unit at Mundathikode village, in Thrissur —PTI

At least 13 people were killed and several others injured in a blast at a fireworks manufacturing unit in Mundathicode, Kerala's Thrissur district, on Tuesday, officials said.

Thirteen injured people, including three women, are undergoing treatment, with five in critical condition suffering over 70 per cent burns, authorities at Government Medical College, Thrissur, said. Hospital officials confirmed receiving 13 bodies, including dismembered remains. A control room has been opened at the medical college.

Around 40 workers were suspected to be present at the unit, which was preparing crackers for a temple devaswom ahead of the Thrissur Pooram on 26 April. The explosion occurred around 3.30 pm, with intermittent blasts hampering rescue efforts. Firecrackers were being manufactured in multiple temporary sheds in an isolated area amid paddy fields, of which at least five were destroyed.

Residents joined rescue efforts, shifting the injured and recovering remains, while fire and police teams battled continuing explosions. Houses in nearby areas were also damaged. A surviving worker said there was a sudden flash before the fire.

The state has sanctioned Rs 50 lakh for relief, and the Prime Minister announced Rs 2 lakh ex gratia for victims' families. —*PTI*

9 held after BJP–TMC clash in Kolkata

KOLKATA, 21 APRIL

Nine people were arrested after a violent clash between BJP and TMC workers outside Ekbalpur Police Station in Kolkata. The incident occurred during an election campaign event on Hossain Shah Road, where supporters of both parties gathered, leading to a confrontation. The arrested included five BJP workers and four TMC workers, police said.

The clash began when BJP supporters, led by candidate Rakesh Singh, assembled for a meeting. TMC supporters responded with counter-slogans, resulting in a heated exchange that soon turned violent.

The incident led to injuries to some participants, confirmed DCP Harikrishna Pai. Three FIRs were registered in connection with the violence. The clash took place as campaigning intensified ahead of the first phase of polling, scheduled for 23 April, with the second phase set for 29 April. Vote counting is on 4 May.

Election authorities have implemented additional security measures after the incident. The Election Commission has restricted the use of motorcycles on roads between 6 pm and 6 am from two days before polling, and pillion riders are only permitted in specific circumstances. — *Agencies*

>>>More on Page 3

- The clash began when BJP supporters assembled for a meeting. TMC supporters responded with counter-slogans, resulting in a heated exchange that soon turned violent.

KHARGE CALLS MODI 'TERRORIST,' THEN CLARIFIES

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday sparked a row after calling Prime Minister Narendra Modi a "terrorist" during a press conference, before clarifying that he meant the PM was "terrorising people and political parties".

BJP reacted sharply, terming the Congress an "Urban Naxal Party".

Kharge made the remark while questioning the AIADMK's alliance with the BJP in Tamil Nadu, asking how a party invoking leaders like Annadurai could align with Modi. He alleged the BJP does not believe in equality and justice and said such alliances weaken democracy and the legacy of leaders like Periyar, Kamaraj, Karunanidhi and BR Ambedkar. The remarks come days after Modi accused the Opposition of "foeticide" for defeating the women's reservation bill. — *PTI*

Woman sets lover on fire in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 21 APR

A 27-year-old man was allegedly charred to death on Tuesday after a woman he was in a relationship set him on fire at her house, police said.

The deceased, is Kiran, a native of Tumakuru, who worked at a outlet of a mobile service provider, they said.

The incident occurred in Byadarahalli area at 2pm. A cloth was found tied around his eyes. Probe indicates that the woman allegedly tied him up under the pretext of a "western-style proposal".

Police suspect the murder was premeditated, as the woman believed he had been avoiding her of late.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Northwest) DL Nagesh said Kiran and the accused, Prema, were working at a store near Bashyam Circle in Rajajinagar. Kiran had gone to her house to pick her up as a new outlet of their company had been opened in Nelamangala. The officer said she allegedly set him on fire by pouring kerosene on him.

The incident led to heavy smoke, and the victim's body was found in a charred condition, police said. At the time of the incident, only Prema was present at home, as her family members were away. —*PTI*

Yusuf Pathan's father-in-law held for assaulting driver

MUMBAI, 21 APRIL

Former cricketer and TMC MP Yusuf Pathan's father-in-law, Khalid Khan, and two others, including a relative, were arrested for allegedly assaulting a man in a road rage incident. The victim, Shoaib Khan, sustained multiple injuries requiring hospital treatment. The incident occurred on Saturday night near Hirabai Compound in Mazgaon when water on the road was splashed onto Shoaib Khan after Yusuf Khan's car drove through a puddle. This led to verbal exchanges and a physical altercation, with Shoaib Khan hitting the car with a wooden stick. —*PTI*

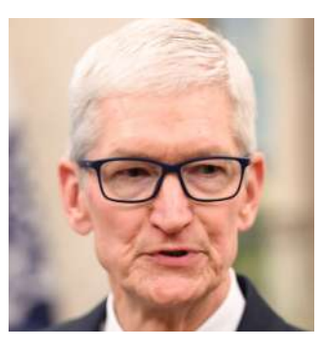
AFTER 15 YEARS

Tim Cook steps down as Apple CEO

SAN FRANCISCO, 21 APRIL

Apple CEO Tim Cook will step down after nearly 15 years at the helm, handing over to hardware chief John Ternus on September 1, the company said. Cook, 65, will remain as executive chairman, similar to transitions made by Jeff Bezos and Reed Hastings.

Cook, who succeeded Steve Jobs in 2011, will continue as CEO through the summer to ensure a smooth transition. As executive chairman, he will engage with policymakers and support key company initiatives. He described leading Apple Inc. as the greatest privilege of his life.



During his tenure, Apple's market capitalisation surged from about USD 350 billion to USD 4 trillion, while annual revenue nearly quadrupled to over USD 416 billion in FY2025 from USD 108 billion in FY2011. Cook oversaw the expansion of Apple's global footprint to more than 200 countries, a retail network of over 500 stores, and an installed base exceeding 2.5 billion devices. He also led the launch of new categories such as Apple Watch, AirPods and Apple Vision Pro, alongside services like iCloud, Apple Pay, Apple TV and Apple Music. The services division now generates over USD 100 billion annually, cementing Apple's shift towards a services-led model. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 7

KIA Customs seizes 9th century Nepal sculpture

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

The Air Cargo Commissionerate here intercepted a consignment imported from Austria containing a 9th-century sculpture identified as a stolen antiquity from Nepal, officials said on Tuesday. The consignment, declared as a "Grey Stone Stele of Padmapani," was imported from Vienna, Austria, they said. On expert examination by the ASI, the sculpture was identified as a 9th-century antiquity, matching archival records of a stolen Padmapani stele reported missing from Nepal, Bengaluru Customs said on X. Nepal confirmed that it was a stolen treasure. "The consignment remains with Customs and action is underway in coordination with the Ministry of Culture and MEA," it said. *—PTI*

2 killed as poultry vehicle rams parked truck

BELAGAVI, 21 APRIL

Two people from Shivamogga were killed, and another was seriously injured after a vehicle transporting poultry rammed into a stationary truck along the highway near Belagavi early on Tuesday. The Hire Bagewadi police identified the deceased as Wasim, 28, and Mubarak, 22. The vehicle's driver, Basavaraj Irrappa Hanchinamani, 37, sustained critical injuries and was admitted to district hospital in Belagavi. Police said the poultry vehicle was en route from Kolhapur to Shivamogga district when it hit a truck. Hundreds of chickens were also killed. Despite restrictions on parking along highways, trucks are frequently parked between Hirebagewadi and Honaga due to roadside hotels. *—SALAR NEWS*

Haveri police arrest man for damaging Gandhi statue

HAVERI, 21 APRIL

The Haveri Police have arrested 28-year-old Vaibhav Raikar for vandalising Mahatma Gandhi's statue at Gandhi Circle, Haveri City. Haveri SP Yashoda Vantagodi stated that a special police team tracked him down using CCTV footage from various locations. She said, "The accused, Vaibhav Raikar, is 28 years old and is mentally unstable. The police arrested the accused after examining the CCTV footage from other places." The two-foot-tall Gandhi statue was found broken on Monday, with the right hand damaged. Locals expressed anger. The police have remanded the accused to judicial custody, and a case has been registered at the Haveri City Police Station. *—ANI*

Alliance Française to unveil library with 7,500 books

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

The Alliance Française de Bangalore is set to unveil its newly renovated 2,500 sq ft library, housing 7,500 books in French, English and Kannada. Originally established in 1980, the facility has been upgraded for the first time. Named after philospher Simone de Beauvoir, the library features a dedicated quiet reading and research room, along with a screening space honouring SL Bhyrappa. French Ambassador Thierry Mathou will inaugurate the media centre on 22 April, alongside a new Campus France. *—SALAR NEWS*

Mangaluru cop alleges caste harassment

Home Minister asks DGP to submit report

BENGALURU/ MANGALURU, 21 APRIL

—PTI

An officer Directorate of Civil Rights Enforcement (DCRE) has accused two senior IPS officers of caste-based discrimination and mental harassment and threatened to die by suicide.

The victim, Srinivas, has submitted a representation to DCRE Director General Umesh Kumar and alleged that the officers pressured him in certain cases to file closure reports favouring the accused. The letter was dated 11 April.

Additionally, he released a five-minute video detailing how he was treated and harassed, in which he also hinted at taking an extreme step.

He claims the harassment began after he refused to submit what he describes as biased final reports.

According to him, the officers then encouraged complainants to file false petitions against him, using these complaints as a basis to initiate inquiries and subject him to continued harassment.

He alleged that despite obtaining a stay order from the Karnataka Administrative Tribunal (KAT) against his transfer to Udupi, he was relieved of duties through "fabricated documents" and warned that if the harassment continued, he would be driven to suicide.

Home Minister G Parameshwara said the government has taken serious notice of the allegations and directed the Director General of Police (DGP) MA Saleem to submit a detailed report.

Parameshwara also said that the government has also taken cognisance of a complaint by Mangaluru Superintendent of Police Kashinatah, who highlighted Srinivas' concerns, and raised questions about the functioning of the Mangaluru police.

Speaking to reports in the City, the Home Minister said that the government was taking both cases seriously and that it would take a decision after receiving the report. *—Agencies*

'POLITICAL DVPT IN MAY'

Rajanna wonders if 'black magic' made CM 'helpless'

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

Senior Congress MLA K N Rajanna on Tuesday predicted political developments in the State in May, amid speculation about a leadership change or cabinet reshuffle. He reiterated that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had become "helpless" under some "compulsions", but added that someone performed "black magic" on him.

"There will be political developments in the state in the month of May... (but) Siddaramaiah actually has strength, everything will be fine in the days ahead," Rajanna told reporters in the City, without sharing any specifics of his discussions with the CM.

"Politics is not a stagnant water, it is like flowing water. Only when it is flowing will it have purity. If it is stagnant, it will lose its purity. Similarly, for politics to maintain its purity, political developments should keep happening," Rajana added.

It is worth recalling that Rajanna had created a political storm by alleging that there would be a "revolution" in October and November last year – amid rumours of a power tussle between Siddaramaiah and his Deputy DK Shivakumar. Now, media reports claim that Siddaramaiah's fate is tied to the party's success in the bypolls – something he had dismissed.

Rajana added that he is doesn't believe in "black magic" but seeing how "helpless" Siddaramaiah has become, he will "investigate" it. He had alluded that Shivakumar had been pressuring Siddaramaiah, but did not name the former. *—PTI*

4 held for running prostitution racket in City

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

Four individuals, including three women, have been detained for allegedly operating a prostitution racket in spas and a house across the City, police confirmed on Tuesday. During the same operation, the Women Protection Wing of the Bengaluru Police's Central Crime Branch (CCB) rescued six women believed to have been forced into prostitution by the accused.

Police said they received credible information from informants on various occasions, revealing that prostitution activities were being conducted in spas near Sunkadakatte in Marathahalli and in a house in Manjunatha Nagar.

Raids at these locations led to the rescue of six women, the police added.

The four suspects, including three women, were apprehended for forcing or inducing the victims into prostitution. During interrogation, the accused admitted to contacting men seeking such services over the phone.

Cases have been registered at HAL, Byadarahalli, and Bagalagunte Police Stations. All four suspects appeared before the court on different dates and have been remanded to judicial custody. *—PTI*

Why raids only on Congressmen: CM

CM Siddaramaiah, MLA NA Haris *—PTI*

CHAMARAJANAGARA/ BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday accused the Central government and its agencies of consistently targeting Congress members by ordering searches on their properties.

He was reacting to searches conducted by the Enforcement Directorate on Monday on several individuals, including the sons of Karnataka Congress MLA NA Haris and the grandson of former Union Cabinet minister K Rahman Khan, in connection with a Bitcoin-linked money laundering case.

"The central government always targets Congress leaders. Will they raid the houses of BJP leaders?" Siddaramaiah said.

More than a dozen premises in the City were searched as part of the operation carried out by the ED under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The premises searched comprised those of Mohammed Haris Nalapad and Omar Farook Nalapad, the sons of Haris; Aqeeb Khan, the grandson of veteran Rahman; and an alleged crypto hacker, Srikrishna Ramesh, alias Sriki, officials said. The case stems back to 2017.

Nalapad said that the 21-hour search, the ED only confiscated two mobile phones. The agency has name the Haris' sons as the main benefiters of the scam.

Meanwhile, Home Minister G Parameshwara said that the government Special Investigative Team (SIT) to probe the case and was awaiting the report.Although he felt that the report has been delayed, Parameshwara said "we need to know the reasons for the raid". *—Agencies*

Muslim leaders claim 'campaign' against Cong

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

A section of Muslim leaders, including office-bearers of the Congress have alleged that there is a "malicious campaign" against the party and accusing it of going against the community's leadership, they described it as "very unfortunate and misleading."

This comes amid allegations of internal "conspiracy" against the Congress' official candidate Samarth Mallikarjun in the 9 April Davangere South assembly segment.

The group "strongly urged" the party not to succumb to such "pressure tactics or political blackmail", and called for strict action against all those found guilty of "anti-party activities", in a joint statement signed by KPCC Vice Presidents Obedulla Shariff, Y Sayeed Ahmed, Mehboob Soudagar and A R Muzammil Hussain among others.

The ruling Congress has suspended MLC K Abdul Jabbar from primary membership and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has relieved another MLC, Naseer Ahmed, as the CM's political secretary.

The action followed allegations by a group of Muslim leaders, including Chief Whip in the Legislative Council Saleem Ahmed, and MLAs Rizwan Arshad and Yasir Ahmed, that certain party members conspired to defeat Samarth. Housing Minister BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan is also under the scanner.

> **When the High Command decided on the candidate, minority community leaders were present. The decision was made in their presence, and they had accepted it. Why did some of them oppose it later?**
>
> -Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

The statement said that the situation is a result of a failure within the Muslim leadership, which, they said, was unable to secure a ticket for a Muslim candidate. "Despite the party explicitly requesting a broader panel of names, no alternatives were presented and only Abdul Jabbar's name was insisted," the statement alleged. "These factions contributed to division within the Muslim vote base, deliberately creating confusion and misleading Congress supporters... ultimately benefiting the BJP in the election."

The leaders said they fully supported the suspension of Jabbar, and said that Naseer continues to be an active Congress member as he continues to hold his MLC position. *—PTI*

A GBA staffer waters roadside plants amid high summer temperatures, in the City, on Tuesday *—MOHAMMED ASAD*

Enough water in tanks: Boseraju

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

Karnataka Minister NS Boseraju on Tuesday said that minor irrigation tanks across the State are having good water storage levels, with the 3,788 tanks under the department's jurisdiction providing life-sustaining water to a large agricultural command area of approximately 4,45,009 hectares.

In a statement, the Minor Irrigation minister said that even in peak summer, 165 tanks are full. Additionally, 1,355 tanks have retained more than 51 per cent capacity, 1,143 tanks have water levels up to 50 per cent, and 959 tanks are at roughly 30 per cent storage capacity.

District-wise, Davanagere leads the State in water storage, with 27 tanks remaining full even during summer. Chikkamagaluru follows closely with 46 full tanks, indicating strong water retention. Other top-performing districts include Hassan, Tumakuru, and Kolar.

Boseraju, who also holds the portfolio of Science and Technology, said 1,184 tanks are being actively filled through 145 tank-filling lift irrigation projects under the Minor Irrigation Department.

"By ensuring a continuous flow of water to these tanks through lift irrigation projects across departments, as well as supplying treated and surface water to the Bayaluseeme districts, we have taken proactive measures to prevent them from drying out during the summer," he said. *—PTI*

BEML wins Rs 590 order for mine clearing trawls

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

The city based BEML Limited on Tuesday said the Ministry of Defence has awarded it a Rs 590 crore contract for the supply of trawl assemblies for deployment on the Indian Army's T-72 and T-90 tanks.

The contract agreement was formally signed and exchanged between senior officials of the Ministry of Defence and BEML in New Delhi.

In a statement, BEML said the advanced mine trawls were indigenously designed and developed in collaboration with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), specifically its Research and Development Engineers (R&DE) unit in Pune.

"This state-of-the-art system substantially reduces dependence on imports while aligning strongly with the Government of India's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India)," the statement said.

Meanwhile, defence PSU BEL has signed an MoU with BMIT to collaborate on the design, development, and manufacturing of advanced electronic modules, subsystems, and systems for defence electronics and aerospace.

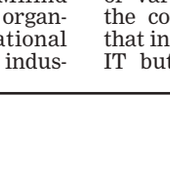
The collaboration will focus on critical technology domains such as electronic warfare (EW), naval radars, and drones.

Bit Mapper Integration Technologies Pvt Ltd is a global provider of electronic system design and manufacturing (ESDM) solutions. *—PTI*

—BEML

HC rejects State's review petition on SSLC grading

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL



The Karnataka High Court on Tuesday declined to entertain the State government's review petition against a single judge's directions to conduct the valuation of the recently conducted SSLC examination as per the existing rules.

A single judge bench had recently ruled that marks, not grades, should be awarded for third language papers in the SSLC examination. The State government recently notified that grades should be provided.

The bench presided over by Justice E S Indiresh took note of the fact that the new evaluation system was introduced after the SSLC exams. The court maintained that the government neither promulgated rules nor passed the regular notification.

Advocate General Shashi Kiran Shetty argued that lakhs of students had failed in Hindi, which was their third language subject. Hence, the decision was taken to minimise the pressure on the students. He also told the court that the State government is coming up with appropriate amendment in the draft rule.

However, the court maintained that the State government should have clarified on this before issuing the notification. The judge also noted that 83 per cent of students passed the examination. If the intention was to see everyone pass, why conduct the exam, the court said.*—PTI*

'BEING TARGETTED'

VHP to raise workplace issues of Hindu women with cos

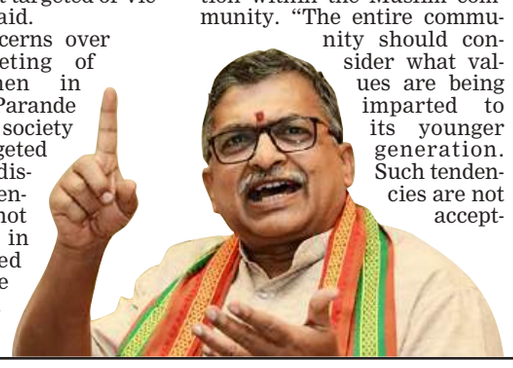
HASSAN, 21 APRIL

The VHP will approach corporate and industry bodies across the country to ensure that Hindu women are not "targeted or victimised" at workplaces, a senior leader of the organisation said on Tuesday.

Addressing a press conference here, VHP Organising General Secretary Milind Parande said the Hindu organisation will meet national associations of various industries and raise concerns over alleged incidents involving "love jihad" and forced conversions in workplaces. The term "love jihad" is used by right-wing groups to allege a conspiracy by Muslim men to lure Hindu women into relationships and marriage to convert them to Islam.

"The VHP will systematically meet national associations of various industries across the country. We will ensure that in any workplace--not just IT but all industries--Hindu women are not targeted or victimised," he said.

Raising concerns over alleged targeting of Hindu women in workplaces, Parande said, "Hindu society is being targeted and is facing distress. Such tendencies are not acceptable in any civilised society." He also urged introspection within the Muslim community. "The entire community should consider what values are being imparted to its younger generation. Such tendencies are not acceptable in any civilised society," he said.



Parande said that rising incidents could lead to the entire Muslim community coming under suspicion.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader's remarks come in the wake of the alleged harassment and religious coercion at the Nashik unit of IT Tata Consultancy Services (TCS).

He said his visit to Karnataka was part of a nationwide organisational tour aimed at expansion. *—PTI*

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Month-long high decibel campaign ends in TN

Parties are now barred from campaigns, meets as state enters 48-hour silent period ahead of 23 April polls

CHENNAI, 21 APRIL

The high-intensity campaign for Tamil Nadu's 23 April Assembly election ended at 6 pm on Tuesday, with the mandatory 48-hour "silent period" coming into force. Parties and candidates are now barred from public meetings, processions and campaign advertisements. The model code of conduct, in place since the poll announcement, will remain until the election process concludes. Votes will be counted on 4 May.

Security has been tightened across sensitive areas. Chief Minister MK Stalin wrapped up his campaign in Kolathur, his constituency, later posting on X that he would be a "danger" to those betraying Tamil Nadu and opposing its growth. He also criticised the Centre's push for delimitation as an attempt to "punish" better-performing states.

In Tuticorin, DMK leader Kanimozhi expressed confidence of retaining power. AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami, who leads the NDA in the state, ended his campaign in western Tamil Nadu, urging voters to oust the "corrupt DMK regime" and end "family rule".

Top leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Maharashtra's Devendra Fadnavis, Rajasthan's Bhajanlal Sharma, Telangana's Revanth Reddy and Arvind Kejriwal campaigned across the state.

While development, corruption and family rule dominated the campaign, delimitation emerged as a key issue. The DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance and AIADMK-led NDA are locked in a tight contest. The DMK is contesting 164 seats and allies 70, while the AIADMK is contesting 169 and allies 65.

Actor Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam and Seeman's Naam Tamilar Katchi, both contesting all 234 seats, have added a new dimension. In all, 4,023 candidates are in fray, with over 5.73 crore voters eligible to cast their ballots. —*PTI*

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister travels in auto while campaigning in Chennai's Kolathur constituency on Tuesday —***PTI***

> **I am telling you, law and order is deteriorating in Tamil Nadu. The city's infrastructure, civic infrastructure, is not up to the mark. Same old roads, no improvement," Naidu alleged.**
>
> -N Chandrababu Naidu, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister

'I will be danger to those who betray TN'

CHENNAI/SALEM, 21 APRIL

Chief Minister MK Stalin on Tuesday said he would be a "danger" to those who betray Tamil Nadu or hinder its growth, while accusing the Centre of using delimitation to "punish" high-performing states like Tamil Nadu.

With two days left for the Assembly polls, the DMK president, in a video message, recalled comparisons with late leader M Karunanidhi, saying he could never match him but would firmly oppose forces harming the state.

Stalin reiterated his commitment to "development with social justice" and rejected claims that the DMK is anti-Hindu, noting Tamil Nadu has the highest number of temples. He accused the BJP of controlling the AIADMK and warned of "atrocities" if the AIADMK-led NDA came to power.

In Salem, AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami alleged the DMK had earlier tried to split his party but failed. He termed the election a fight against "dynastic rule" and accused the ruling party of misleading people on investments and jobs. Questioning the DMK's claim of attracting Rs 15 lakh crore investments and creating 35 lakh jobs, Palaniswami said such projects take years to materialise and demanded a white paper. He also criticised DMK MPs for failing to press the Centre on key projects, including a proposed defence facility. —*PTI*

IT DEPT FLAGS RS 7.6 CR VARIATIONS IN UDHAYANIDHI'S AFFIDAVITS

CHENNAI, 21 APRIL

A fresh submission before the Madras High Court has brought attention to discrepancies in the election disclosures of DMK leader Udhayanidhi Stalin, with the IT Department pointing out inconsistencies between his 2021 and 2026 affidavits.

According to the Department's filing, an investment worth Rs 7.36 crore in Red Giant Movies that was declared in 2021 does not appear in the 2026 affidavit. At the same time, the later affidavit reflects a Rs 2.63 crore investment in the same company in the name of his spouse, which had not been disclosed earlier.

The response highlighted that there are variations across filings. However, it clarified that "no conclusive finding can be made at this stage." — *Agencies*

Never exploited MGR: Haasan trolls Vijay

TIRUCHIRAPALLI, 21 APRIL

MNM Chief, actor Kamal Haasan, said that he had sat on the laps of late chief minister MG Ramachandran and the legendary Tamil actor of yore, Sivaji Ganesan, as a child, and yet he never took advantage of that, in an apparent dig at actor-politician Vijay's attempts to portray himself as "MGR's successor." Haasan was campaigning for DMK's Tiruchirapalli East candidate, Inigo S Irudayaraj, on Sunday. Along with Irudyaraj, Haasan led a rally through Tiruchirapalli, urging people to vote for 'Rising Sun,' the DMK's symbol. Incidentally, Vijay is also contesting from Tiruchirapalli East. — *PTI*

Women's political career starts in men's room: Pappu

PATNA, 21 APRIL

Independent MP Rajesh Ranjan, alias Pappu Yadav, on Tuesday drew sharp criticism for making disparaging remarks about women while commenting on women's reservation in Parliament.

"In India, women are called goddesses. But unfortunately, they will never be respected in the country. I hold the system and the larger society responsible for this," he said on Monday, adding that 90 per cent of women cannot start their political career without "entering the room of male politicians," a remark widely interpreted as implying sexual favours.

A video of the Purnea MP's comments has gone viral on social media, triggering outrage from BJP leaders.

Meanwhile, the Bihar State Women's Commission has issued a notice to Yadav, asking him to respond within three days and explain why the Lok Sabha Speaker should not be approached with a recommendation for his disqualification.

Commission Chairperson Apsara said the panel had taken suo motu cognisance of the remarks. —*PTI*

BJP will resolve Gorkha issue in 6 months of winning: Shah

KURSEONG, 21 APRIL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday sharpened his attack on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, promising jobs, a Gorkha solution and implementation of the Uniform Civil Code as he led an aggressive final-day campaign across West Bengal.

Addressing rallies from the Darjeeling hills to industrial Kulti and agrarian Medinipur, Shah accused the TMC of corruption, "infiltration", dynastic politics and joblessness. In Kurseong, he pledged a "permanent political solution" to the Gorkha issue within six months and said deleted names would be restored and "false cases" withdrawn.

In Kulti, he promised merit-based jobs for one lakh youths annually, revival of industry, and action against illegal mining and pollution. Targeting "bhaipo culture", he ruled out any dynastic succession, assuring the next chief minister would be a Bengali BJP worker.

At Salboni, Shah framed the polls as a fight against corruption and fear, invoked the Ram temple issue, and criticised remarks linked to a "Babri Masjid" in the state. He also promised to implement the Uniform Civil Code, pitching it as key to women's safety.

At Chandipur, Shah urged voters to cast ballots without fear, citing deployment of 2,450 CAPF companies, and warned "TMC goons" of action after 4 May.

He also vowed to deport infiltrators, seal the Bangladesh border within 45 days, and set up a betel leaf research centre. —*PTI*

Home Minister Amit Shah plays a traditional drum during a rally in Chandipur —***PTI***

Didi confident of 4th term, attacks BJP over 'cut money'

HALDIA, 21 APRIL

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday asserted that the Trinamool Congress (TMC) will return to power for a fourth straight term, claiming "no one wants the BJP to form government" in the state.

Addressing rallies in Haldia, Jagaddal and Kolkata, Banerjee said her month-long tour showed clear public opposition to the BJP and urged Opposition unity to oust the NDA at the Centre. She dismissed the BJP's "chargesheet" against her government and issued a counter-charge, alleging "cut money" collection in the Haldia dock and industrial area, even accusing an unnamed "traitor" of siphoning funds.

She also criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remark that he was the BJP candidate in all 294 seats, saying he would first have to quit as prime minister.

Alleging irregularities in the 2021 Nandigram count, Banerjee asked party workers to identify those involved, warning of consequences. She said industries are expanding and healthcare improving in the state. Banerjee claimed unprecedented deployment of central forces — 2,450 companies — and said she would protest any wrongdoing, even staging a 'satyagraha' if restrained. She also criticised Election Commission curbs on motorcycle movement ahead of polling, questioning how people would commute.

Accusing the BJP of false promises and privatisation of public sector units, she alleged corruption within the ruling party. —*PTI*

WB CM Mamata Banerjee with tribals in Jorasanko constituency ahead of the West Bengal Assembly elections —***PTI***

Modi 'jhalmuri' buy will impact West Bengal polls: Anurag

BJP MP Anurag Thakur on Tuesday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi buying 'jhalmuri' in Jhargram would have an impact in the West Bengal Assembly polls.

The prime minister posted a video on Sunday on his X account in which he was seen buying 'jhalmuri', a Bengali street food made of puffed rice, green chillies, and spices, from a small shop in Jhargram. The PM paid the shopkeeper for the snack. When the man refused to take the money, the PM insisted that he accept it. —*PTI*

BJP MP Anurag Thakur eats fish curry and rice in Kolkata —***PTI***

Bulldozer buddhi: Akhilesh, Mahua troll Yogi for misquoting Netaji

SP Chief Akhilesh Yadav joined TMC MP Mahua Moitra in attacking Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath over a misattributed quote, with both leaders criticising him on social media. The row erupted after Adityanath, at a rally in West Bengal, wrongly credited Swami Vivekananda with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's famous line, "Give me blood and I will give you freedom." Moitra called him "bulldozer buddhi" and urged him to "get your facts right", while Yadav took a swipe at the renaming of places under his government.

—*PTI*

Sharad Pawar hospitalised in Mumbai

MUMBAI, 21 APRIL

NCP (SP) president and Rajya Sabha member Sharad Pawar has been admitted to a private hospital in Mumbai for a health check-up, sources said on Tuesday. The 85-year-old former Union minister was admitted to Breach Candy Hospital two days ago, they said. "He is in the hospital for a check-up and follow-up. There is nothing serious," a source informed. Recently, Pawar took the oath as a Rajya Sabha member while seated in a wheelchair. He had also addressed the media in Delhi. In February this year, the former Maharashtra chief minister was admitted to a hospital in Pune twice following a chest infection and dehydration. Sources reiterated that his current admission is precautionary and part of routine medical supervision and evaluation. —***PTI***

WROTE LETTERS IN 2017, 2018

Centre slept on women's quota demand by Sonia, RaGa: Cong

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

The Congress on Tuesday recalled Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi's earlier letters to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding immediate implementation of women's reservation in legislatures, saying the Modi Government 'slept' on the demand and delayed it now by linking it to delimitation.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh recalled that in 2017, Sonia Gandhi had written to Prime Minister Modi on the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill in her capacity as the then Congress President.

"The Congress Party's stance has been unflinching and unchanged. It is the Modi Government that slept on this demand and has then tried to delay it by linking it to delimitation," Ramesh said on X and shared Gandhi's letter to the PM.

In her letter, Sonia Gandhi had said, "I am writing to request you to take advantage of your majority in the Lok Sabha to now get the Women's Reservation Bill passed in the Lower House as well. The Congress Party has always and will continue to support this legislation which will be a significant step forward in the empowerment of women."

In another post, Ramesh said Rahul Gandhi, as Congress President, had written to the Prime Minister on July 16, 2018, demanding the immediate implementation of women's reservation. He said eight years later the Prime Minister was yet to act on this demand.

He also shared Rahul Gandhi's letter to the PM from 2018, in which he had requested support to ensure the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill. —*PTI*

Congress on Tuesday recalled Sonia and Rahul Gandhi's letters to PM Narendra Modi demanding implementation of women's quota —***PTI***

Yogi leads protest against 'defeat of women quota bill'

LUCKNOW, 21 APRIL

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday led a 'Jan Aakrosh Mahila Padyatra' in Lucknow, protesting the defeat of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill for delimitation and accusing the Congress and Samajwadi Party (SP) of an "anti-women" stance.

The government is linking the delimitation bill to women's reservation

Thousands of women marched from his residence to the Vidhan Bhavan. Adityanath said the Opposition had "misused" the opportunity given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to shed its "anti-women image", adding that protests by women across the country reflected public anger.

The bill, which sought to implement women's quota and raise Lok Sabha seats to 816, was defeated last week. Adityanath alleged the Congress, SP, TMC and DMK blocked it despite all objections being addressed. He highlighted schemes such as Swachh Bharat, Ujjwala and Ayushman Bharat as measures promoting women's empowerment. —*PTI*

Cong gives privilege notice against PM's address to nation

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Congress leader KC Venugopal has moved a privilege notice against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accusing him of breaching parliamentary privilege by imputing motives to Opposition MPs in his address to the nation after the defeat of the women's reservation bill.

Venugopal argues that the Prime Minister violated privilege by attacking Opposition members who voted against the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026. The address is criticised as a "blatant abuse of power" for utilizing a state platform to criticize opponents

He urged that the matter be referred to the Committee on Privileges for inquiry and initiation of proceedings.

The bill had failed to secure the required two-thirds majority under Article 368 of the Constitution. Venugopal argued that casting aspersions on MPs for their conduct in Parliament amounts to a "gross breach of privilege and contempt of the House", undermining the independence of elected representatives and the authority of Parliament.

He termed the Prime Minister's address "unprecedented, unethical and a blatant abuse of power", adding that it was improper to criticise Opposition parties after failing to secure majority support in the House.

Venugopal also contended that the bill, while proposing women's reservation, sought to amend Article 82 and dilute safeguards on delimitation, which Opposition members were resisting. He said MPs were discharging their constitutional duty in opposing the measure.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh supported the move, alleging the address marked a departure from the convention of using such broadcasts for national unity, and described it as "partisan demagoguery".

Venugopal maintained that under parliamentary conventions and Article 105, no authority, including the Prime Minister, can question or attribute motives to MPs' conduct in the House, and called for immediate action to uphold parliamentary sanctity. —*PTI*

—FREEPIK

Baby shower held for HIV+ women in Maharashtra

PARBHANI, 21 APRIL

An NGO has organised a baby shower for two HIV-positive pregnant women in Maharashtra's Parbhani city, celebrating motherhood with dignity. The event, held last week, aimed at dispelling myths surrounding HIV. It emphasised that with proper medical care, children born to HIV-positive mothers can be healthy and HIV-negative, an NGO representative said. Both women had married through the efforts of the Homoeopathic Academy of Research and Charities (HARC). During the ceremony, they were given gifts. A highlight of the programme was a play titled 'Kali Umalatana', staged by a cultural group. The performance conveyed messages of women's health, and social awareness, the representative said. —*PTI*

Constitution will help believers facing bias: SC

Sabari deity is 'Naishtika Brahmachari,' a celibate: Lawyer

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

The Supreme Court asked the chief priest of the Sabarimala Ayyappa Temple whether the Constitution won't come to the help of a believer who is not allowed to touch the deity.

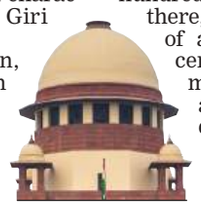
The remark by the court came on Tuesday after the chief priest said that when a devotee goes to a temple for worship, it can't be in antagonism to the deity's characteristics.

The nine-judge Constitution bench is hearing petitions about discrimination against women at places of worship, including the Sabarimala Temple in Kerala.

Appearing for the 'thantri', senior advocate V Giri submitted that the nature of ceremonies and rituals followed in any temple is an integral part of the religion.

"When a devotee goes to a temple for worship, it can't be in antagonism to the characteristics of a deity. He/she has to accept the essential characteristics of the deity," Giri said.

Appearing for the 'thantri,' senior advocate V Giri submitted that the rituals followed in any temple is an integral part of religion —*PTI*



Posing a question, Justice Amanullah asked, "When I go to a temple, my fundamental belief is that he is the Lord, right?

"I go there with hundred per cent faith. And there, I am told that because of a birth, a lineage, a certain situation, permanently you are not allowed to touch the deity. Now, will the Constitution not come to his/her rescue?" Justice Amanullah remarked.

- The tantri's lawyer said the petitioners have not submitted material to show that the concept of 'Naishtika Brahmachari' doesn't constitute an essential part of religion

Giri replied that if there is a complete ban on anybody becoming a priest, then that will be taken care of either by Article 25(2)(b) or by the State itself.

The lawyer said "Naishtika Brahmachari" (eternal celibate) is considered an essential characteristic of the Sabarimala deity. He contended that the writ petitioners have not submitted any material to show that the concept of "Naishtika Brahmachari" is either misconceived or doesn't form the essential form of religion. — *PTI*

WAR ON TERROR

Two ISI agents held for planning attacks in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

The Special Cell of the Delhi Police arrested two operatives allegedly working for Pakistan-based gangster and ISI proxy Shahzad Bhatti. The police also unearthed a conspiracy to carry out firing, grenade attacks and targeted killings in the Delhi-NCR region, an official said on Tuesday. The suspects, Rajveer, 21, and Vivek Banjara, 19, both natives of Gwalior, were apprehended by the Special Cell.

"Vivek Banjara was arrested from Dabra in Gwalior on 16 April. During interrogation, he disclosed details about his associate Rajveer, leading to the arrest of Rajveer from the Sarai Kale Khan area of Delhi on 18 April," the officer added.

The police said Rajveer was allegedly preparing to attack a prominent hotel in Delhi-NCR as per the directions of his handler Shahzad Bhatti, when he was apprehended. "He was directly handled by an associate of Bhatti, identified as "Rana Bhai," and was assigned key responsibilities," the officer said. He said that Vivek Banjara, also from the Gwalior district, was introduced to the network by Rajveer.

Subsequently, on 9 April, the duo travelled to Amritsar, where they got a pistol, 15-20 live rounds and Rs 20,000. They were tasked with opening fire at a club in Zirakpur in Punjab, which had received extortion threats from Bhatti.

On 11 April, Rajveer allegedly attempted to carry out the firing but failed due to a mechanical problem in the weapon. — *PTI*

—ANI

MP MLA's remarks spark row over son's hit-and-run

SHIVPURI, 21 APRIL

A BJP MP from Madhya Pradesh, Pritam Lodhi, faced controversy after allegedly making remarks against an IPS officer in connection with his son Dinesh Lodhi's hit-and-run case. Dinesh is accused of ramming his SUV into five people. The police questioned Dinesh, and the officer involved said the vehicle's film was removed before a challan was filed. Pritam claimed Jakhar told his son not to show himself in Karera and added that his son would contest elections there. MP Congress President Jitu condemned the lawmaker for threatening officers.—*PTI*

Man detained near Pakistan border in Jammu

JAMMU, 21 APRIL

A 50-year-old man was detained by the BSF in the Mayan Border Out Post area of Makwal, near the International Border. The man was spotted on Monday evening by BSF patrols and taken into custody after failing to explain his presence. Initial inquiries suggested he was mentally challenged, though security agencies are investigating further. No incriminating items were recovered, and the man has been handed over to police for questioning. Officials said detailed interrogation is underway to determine his identity and motives, and they are not ruling out any possibilities. —*PTI*

Kerala cops warn of fake updates for Vivo, iQOO users

THIRU'PURAM, 21 APRIL

Kerala Police have issued a warning about a cyber scam targeting Vivo and iQOO smartphone users through fake "OriginOS Update" messages that trick victims into installing malware and stealing sensitive data, including banking credentials. Users are shown pop-up alerts like "Urgent System Update Required" during phone use. Clicking the link downloads malicious files instead of official updates. Once installed, the malware grants fraudsters control over devices, allowing access to the camera, microphone, SMS, contacts, and other personal data. The scam aims to siphon money from victims' bank accounts. Police advise installing updates only through official settings, avoiding links in messages. Victims should change passwords and report incidents via the cyber helpline 1930 or the National Cyber Crime Portal. —*PTI*

Gujarat ATS busts terror module, arrests 2 men

AHMEDABAD, 21 APRIL

The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) has arrested two persons for allegedly conspiring to carry out anti-national activities by radicalising individuals through social media, officials said.

The suspects planned to create a network aimed at "Ghazwa-e-Hind" (conquest of India), target RSS leaders and recruit youth through social media, they said.

The ATS has been maintaining close surveillance on anti-national activities on social media and the internet through technical and human intelligence.

Specific inputs were received about Irfan Kalekhan Pathan, 22, a resident of Siddhpur in Patan district.

ATS officials brought Pathan in for questioning. An examination of his phone showed that he was in contact with people linked to ISIS and groups through WhatsApp and Instagram.

A preliminary probe suggested that Pathan was actively involved in spreading jihad propaganda and was attempting to build a network of like-minded radicals, it said.

Investigators also found that the suspect had discussed targeting political leaders, individuals associated with the RSS, and was planning to impose Shariat (Islamic law), the ATS said.

- The suspects planned to create a network aimed at 'Ghazwa-e-Hind' (conquest of India), target RSS leaders and recruit youth through social media. The ATS has been keeping tabs on social media and the internet

Pathan was also in touch with terror organisations to facilitate the smuggling of arms from Pakistan and Afghanistan and to raise funds to execute the planned terror attacks across India.

The involvement of Murshid Zahid Akhtar Sheikh, 21, a resident of Sakinaka in Mumbai, also came to light. A team of Gujarat ATS, with assistance from Maharashtra Police, detained Sheikh. — *PTI*

Protesting Nainital workers lathicharged

HALDWANI, 21 APRIL

Tension gripped the Motahaldu area in Uttarakhand's Nainital as hundreds of employees of a private company launched a strike, leading to a heated face-off between some protesters and the police.

A heavy police force was deployed at the site to prevent any untoward incident as workers held a sit-in at the gates of an industrial unit here on Monday, officials said.

Arguments broke out between the police and some youth leaders who had come to support the workers, which quickly escalated into a scuffle.

Police used light force to disperse the crowd after the situation turned volatile, witnesses said.

In Motahaldu, the protesting workers demanded a minimum wage of Rs 20,000 and a fixed eight-hour shift. They alleged that the management forces them to work beyond scheduled hours.

Nearly 500 employees accused the management of exploitation. Female workers alleged "inhumane treatment," claiming restrictions on basic needs like drinking water and washroom breaks, and use of abusive language by officials.

Protesters also demanded the immediate reinstatement of the recently terminated colleagues.

Concerns regarding the company's transport system were also raised. The protesting employees alleged poor maintenance of company buses and inappropriate behaviour by drivers. — *PTI*

Centre ignores Op Sindoor martyr

MUMBAI, 21 APRIL

The Bombay HC slammed the Centre for failing to respond to a petition filed by the mother of an agniveer who died during Operation Sindoor seeking posthumous benefits on par with regular soldiers, and warned of imposing high costs.

Justices Ravindra Ghuge and Hiten Venegaonkar granted the Centre time till 6 May to file its affidavit in response to the plea filed by the mother of Agniveer Murali Naik, who was killed in shelling in J&K in May 2025.The court noted that notices were issued to the Centre in December 2025 and then again in January, but no response has been filed.

The court stated that no further adjournments will be given. rected the Maharashtra government to file its affidavit and posted the matter for hearing on 18 June.

Jyotibai Naik, the mother of Murali Naik said the Agnipath scheme creates an "arbitrary" distinction between Agniveers and regular soldiers, and questioned the "discriminatory" denial of full death benefits to the family. The petition said that Agniveers perform the same duties and face the same risks as regular soldiers, but their families are denied pension and other benefits. — *PTI*

Bank officials held in Rs 2,500 cr Gujarat cyber fraud

RAJKOT, 21 APRIL

Three officials of private banks have been arrested for their alleged involvement in a Rs 2,500-crore cyber fraud in Gujarat's Rajkot district, raising the number of those held in the case to 20, police said.

So far, police have identified 85 bank accounts linked to the racket, with 535 complaints filed on the cybercrime portal.

Those arrested are Maulik Kamani, a personnel manager at Yes Bank in Padadhari; Kalpesh Dangariya, a manager of Axis Bank in Jamnagar; and Anurag Baldha, a personal banker with HDFC Bank, Rajkot (Rural) SP Vijay Gurjar said on Monday. Dangariya and Baldha were earlier employed with Yes Bank, he added. Kamani allegedly assisted the earlier arrested accused in opening and managing suspicious accounts. He also helped bypass banking alerts triggered by high-value transactions by submitting additional documentation to keep accounts active, the SP said.

The official said Kamani was allegedly involved in cash withdrawals that were later routed through hawala channels. Dangariya is accused of facilitating the opening of fraudulent accounts using fake identities. — *PTI*

Fake Mounjaro drug made in Gurugram flat, 2 held

GURUGRAM, 21 APRIL

Authorities have unearthed a racket involving the manufacturing and sale of "fake" Mounjaro (tirzepatide) injections and have arrested two persons here in this connection, an official said.

A nationwide alert has been issued to detect the counterfeit injections and an investigation is underway to unravel the entire network, Drug Control Officer Amandeep Chauhan said on Monday.

He said a Health Department team raided a residential society in Sector 62 on Monday and arrested two people, including the main suspect.

The accused were importing raw drugs from China and manufacturing counterfeit injections of Mounjaro. The entire racket was being run from a flat in the housing complex.

The accused supplied these illegal injections through the B2B portal Indiamart, the officer alleged.

Mounjaro is a weekly injectable medication for type 2 diabetes that significantly improves blood sugar control and aids weight loss.

On Saturday, the team recovered injections worth Rs 70 lakh from a vehicle in DLF Phase 4. While investigating the matter, the team on Monday raided a flat in Sector 62, where injections were prepared by mixing water with raw drugs, officials said.

"The packaging, barcode affixing and labelling were done in the same flat. The team also recovered packaging machines," they added.

Mujjamil, a deliveryman from DLF Phase 4, was initially arrested. Later, the main accused, Avi Sharma, was also taken into custody. — *PTI*

WHAT IS MOUNJARO?

Mounjaro (tirzepatide) is a weekly injectable drug for type 2 diabetes. It significantly improves blood sugar control and aids weight loss by activating both GLP-1 and GIP receptors. It is often used to treat obesity, by reducing appetite and slowing gastric emptying. Common side effects of the drug are nausea, diarrhoea and vomiting. It can cause thyroid tumours very rarely.

COST

Mounjaro 2.5mg (KwikPen - 4 doses): ₹11,000 – ₹13,125

Mounjaro 5mg (KwikPen - 4 doses): ₹16,000 – ₹17,000

Single Vial (2.5mg/5mg): ₹3,500 – ₹5,000

COSTLY POISON

Quitting tobacco could uplift 20.5M Indian households

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

An analysis has estimated that quitting tobacco could help 11.5 per cent or 20.5 million households in India move up one economic class, with rural areas and the poorest households possibly seeing the greatest impact.

Seven million middle-income families may also stand to benefit by quitting tobacco, the estimates published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) Global Health suggest.

Researchers, including those from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and ICMR-National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research (NICPR) in Noida, said the findings show the benefits of tobacco avoidance.

The team added that treatment of tobacco-related disease add up to global losses of more than USD one trillion every year. Around 80 per cent of tobacco users live in low and middle income countries, where a significant proportion of household income is spent on tobacco products, they said.

- The team said treatment of tobacco-related diseases cause global losses of USD 1 trillion every year. Around 80% of tobacco users live in low income countries

The analysis looked at over 261,000 households from the Indian National Sample Survey (NSS) 2022-23 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES), to quantify the economic benefits of quitting tobacco for households in the countries and estimate how many families could be lifted out of poverty. The poorest households were allocated the highest monthly expenditure per head to tobacco (6.4 per cent), as were households in rural areas (6.6 per cent). — *PTI*

Canadian court sentences killer of Ghaziabad student to life

TORONTO/GHAZIABAD, 21 APRIL

A court in Toronto has sentenced Richard Edwin to life imprisonment after rejecting his plea of not being criminally responsible due to mental disorder in the murder of Indian student Kartik Vasudev, his family said on Tuesday.

The Superior Court of Toronto, presided over by Justice Jane Kelly, on Monday found Edwin guilty of two counts of first-degree murder for the killings on 7 April and 9 April, 2022, reports Global News Toronto.

While Edwin admitted to shooting Vasudev, his defence argued he was suffering from schizophrenia and could not distinguish right from wrong, claiming him NCR, that is not criminally responsible.

- The Superior Court of Toronto, presided over by Justice Jane Kelly, on Monday found Edwin guilty of two counts of first-degree murder for the killings on 7 April and 9 April, 2022, reports Global News Toronto. While Edwin admitted to shooting Vasudev, his defence lawyer argued that he was suffering from schizophrenia

The court acknowledged his mental illness but rejected the plea, sentencing him to full life imprisonment without any parole.

The judgment detailed Edwin rushing past Vasudev near Sherbourne station, then turning back at him and firing multiple shots.

Vasudev, a resident of Ghaziabad near New Delhi, moved to Toronto in January 2022 for studies, but was shot and killed within a few months.

His body was repatriated back to India and cremated on the Hindan River's banks. —*PTI*

Students pay tribute to victims of the Pahalgam terror attack in Jammu —*PTI*

A YEAR ON, PAHALGAM ATTACK STILL HAUNTS VICTIMS' KIN

Lt Vinay and his wife Himanshi were on a honeymoon in Pahalgam when terrorists shot him point-blank —*PTI*

A year after the Pahalgam terror attack, life hasn't been the same for the family of Lieutenant Vinay Narwal, the Indian Navy officer who was among the 26 people killed in the ghastly incident.

The family has not been able to overcome their grief and keeps remembering the young naval officer who had his future all planned out, said Rajesh Narwal, father of Lt Vinay.

Lt Vinay, 26, and his wife Himanshi were on a honeymoon in south Kashmir's Pahalgam town when terrorists shot him at point-blank range, an incident in which 25 others, mostly tourists, were also killed on 22 April, 2025.

Speaking to reporters at his Karnal residence, Rajesh Narwal, a government employee, said for the past one year, the family has been grappling with the loss of Lt Vinay.

"After the tragedy struck, our lives completely changed. Earlier, our lives were going smoothly, but now we cannot overcome what has happened. Though we continue to live as we must, life has truly ended for us the day when we received this devastating news," he said.

"A father who loses a young son knows what the pain is. With the passage of time, one may recover from small jolts in life, but this pain will remain forever," he said.

Rajesh said Lt Vinay had his entire life planned out. "He became an officer at a young age. He also maintained a notebook about his plans in life," he said.

Lt Vinay was very affectionate and used to treat others' problems as his own, the deceased officer's father added.

"He was my son, but I think of him as an angel," he said. "I still remember the joy on his face when he took his first step to walk while holding my finger," he recalled. "A few days before his marriage, we went to Delhi for shopping. He had a lot of plans for his family," he said.

Rajesh also recalled that Lt Vinay initially wanted to join the Air Force, but was very happy when he was selected for the Navy to serve the nation.

He further said that the family is determined to honour Lt Vinay's memory in meaningful ways, and praised the government for staying in support of the family after the terror attack.

Lt Vinay is survived by his wife Himanshi, sister Srishti and parents Rajesh and Asha.

In May, after Operation Sindoor, Rajesh Narwal had hailed India's response and praised the Narendra Modi-led government for "sending a strong message" to the perpetrators.

He had said that terrorists "will think 100 times" before repeating such attacks in the future.

Ramachandran's family says nothing has changed

For the family of N Ramachandran, one of the Pahalgam terror attack victims, nothing has changed a year later and the kin is yet to recover from his untimely death.

The 65-year-old Ramachandran, on holiday in Kashmir with his wife, daughter, and grandchildren, was gunned down by terrorists in an attack that sent shockwaves across the country, prompting India to launch Operation Sindoor, a military response targeting terror launchpads in Pakistan.

Arathi R Menon, before whose eyes her father was killed, said there was nothing more for her to say about the tragedy.

"What more to say. I don't want to say anything more. A year has gone by, everything is the same.

So, I don't want to comment anything about it. Right now I am not in a state to comment anything. I am so sorry," she told PTI.

Menon said that the RSS will hold a ceremony near Changampuzha Park here on Wednesday morning.

"On Sunday morning at 10 am there will be a remembrance ceremony at Changampuzha Park," she added.

Menon also said that she will be returning to Dubai soon.

She said that she was in Kochi on-and-off for the past one year and will now return to Dubai permanently like before.

Menon, who works in Dubai, had come to Kerala as part of the planned vacation to Kashmir with her parents and children. —*PTI*

SALAR ساہر

Unseasonal snow hits tribal migration in J&K

- Accompanied by herds of sheep, goats, and horses, the families navigate steep mountain trails, swollen streams, and slippery tracks, exposing themselves to challenges.

Amid unseasonal snowfall, hundreds of Gujjar and Bakerwal tribes have begun their centuries-old biannual migration to the highland pastures of Jammu and Kashmir's Chenab Valley, braving harsh conditions.

The nomads and their livestock embarked on their traditional routes last week, signalling the start of the seasonal transhumance. The movement comes notwithstanding fresh, or rather unusual, snowfall in several higher-altitude areas, which has made the passage particularly risky.

Hundreds of families have been traversing through the plains of Kathua, Samba and Jammu districts towards the high-altitude meadows of the Chenab Valley, a journey that would take at least a month to reach the summer pastures.

According to official figures, in the past 10 days, 250 nomadic families have crossed the 10,500-foot-high snow-bound Chattergalla check post, connecting Bhaderwah in Doda district with Basohli in Kathua district.

Accompanied by herds of sheep, goats, and horses, the families have been navigating steep mountain trails, swollen streams, and slippery tracks, exposing themselves to significant challenges.

Officials said the migration is crucial for the sustenance of these communities, as they depend on highland grazing grounds during summers.

Each year, as winter recedes and spring sets in across the Jammu region, the Gujjar and Bakerwal tribes embark on their centuries-old migration, revitalising the highland pastures of Doda, Kishtwar and Ramban districts in the Chenab Valley.

"Though we face numerous life-threatening challenges during migration, we have been in this profession since time immemorial. We have no option but to continue this extremely difficult way of life, which has been passed down by our forefathers," Abdul Majeed, 85, a resident of Basholi in Kathua who is leading his group to Paddar in Kishtwar, told PTI.

Majeed said that every year, the community loses livestock, including goats and horses, during the arduous journey due to harsh weather conditions, adding that even children and the elderly have, at times, lost their lives. He also said that there have been little to no government assistance.

"Due to snowstorms along the 15-km route between Sarthal and Guldanda, several of our goats died. Food was also scarce for three consecutive days (last week). We now hope to reach our destination in Machail safely," Nishata Begum, 63, said.

She said what was once a time of joy during migration has now turned into a period marked by the loss of hard-earned livestock, compounded by instances of hostility and discrimination from locals.

Begum said despite her two sons being graduates and belonging to the Scheduled Tribe category, they were unable to secure government jobs and were ultimately compelled to continue the centuries-old occupation of their forefathers.

Saddam Chohan, 14, said the journey to the high-altitude meadows brought him face-to-face with harsh realities at Chattergalla, where several goats perished in a snowstorm. He said the family has little choice but to continue the profession practised by his father and grandfather.

Bhaderwah Divisional Forest Officer Devinder Kumar has formed a team of officials, led by Range Officer Sameer Rishu, to ensure that the nomads do not face any hostility from anyone while passing through forest areas.

"Several hundred families have entered the Bhaderwah forest range over the past fortnight, and our team is there to receive them round the clock, as many continue their journey even during night hours," Rishu said.

The officer urged locals not to view the nomadic tribes as trespassers but to welcome them as guests, emphasising that they are an integral part of the forest ecosystem.

He said the communities share a centuries-old, symbiotic relationship with the forests - relying on them for food, shelter and livelihoods while also conserving biodiversity through sustainable practices.

"Their culture, beliefs and traditional knowledge are deeply rooted in nature, making them custodians of the forests rather than mere users," Rishu said.

Tribal nomads traditionally move with their livestock to the upper slopes of the northern Himalayas during the summer, and return to the plains in winter after covering hundreds of miles on foot along serpentine tracks. —*PTI*

A Bakerwal herder moves with his cattle as their biannual migration begins amid heavy snowfall in Chenab region's Bhaderwah on Tuesday —*PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

NORTH BENGAL'S 54 SEATS EMERGE AS KEY BATTLEGROUND

- The BJP had swept north Bengal in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, winning seven of the eight parliamentary seats, and consolidated that rise in 2021 by bagging 30 of the 54 assembly seats against the TMC's 24. The saffron camp retained an edge in 2024, though it slipped from its 2019 peak, winning six of the eight Lok Sabha seats and leading in 31 assembly segments.

Home Minister Amit Shah and TMC Supremo Mamata Banerjee held high-decibel rallies in Darjeeling's Siliguri —*PTI*

North Bengal, with its 54 assembly seats, has once again emerged as one of the principal theatres of the West Bengal assembly polls. While the BJP striving to retain the region that powered its rise in the state, TMC is seeking to reclaim lost ground amid shifting political equations.

Voting in all 54 seats will be held in the first phase on 23 April. For the BJP, north Bengal remains the most viable route to offset the TMC's dominance in south Bengal. For the ruling party, a recovery here is essential if it is to blunt the saffron surge, and deny the opposition the momentum it needs.

The region presents a complex electoral mosaic where old loyalties are under strain and new fault lines are emerging.

The BJP, which turned north Bengal into its strongest bastion after the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and consolidated that rise in the 2021 assembly election, is now battling anti-incumbency, local dissidence and unease over candidate selection.

The TMC, on the other hand, believes it has repaired its organisation, rebuilt bridges with social groups and regained some of the ground it had ceded.

That shifting contest plays out differently across the region's eight districts: Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Cooch Behar, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda. From the hills and tea gardens to the Rajbanshi belt and the minority-dominated plains, each district is shaped by its own mix of identity, welfare, local grievances and political memory.

"North Bengal is no longer a one-wave region. The BJP still has a structural advantage, but the contest is much closer than it was in 2021," political analyst Subhomoy Maitra said.

The BJP had swept north Bengal in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, winning seven of the eight parliamentary seats, and consolidated that rise in 2021 by bagging 30 of the 54 assembly seats against the TMC's 24. The saffron camp retained an edge in 2024, though it slipped from its 2019 peak, winning six of the eight Lok Sabha seats and leading in 31 assembly segments.

The BJP has set itself a target of winning 48 of the 54 seats, banking on its hold over the Rajbanshi belt in Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri, the tea gardens of the Dooars and Terai, and the hills of Darjeeling and Kalimpong.

The party has sharpened its campaign around regional neglect, promising an AIIMS, IIT, IIM and cancer hospital, besides land rights for tea garden workers and recognition for local languages.

Yet, there are signs of unease. The unresolved demand for Gorkhaland in the hills and the call for Kamtapur or Greater Cooch Behar in the plains continue to simmer.

The Kamtapur State Demand Council has backed the BJP, while in the hills the party is relying on the Bimal Gurung-led GJM. But, sections of Gorkha and Rajbanshi voters remain disillusioned over the absence of any "permanent political solution".

Sensing an opening after the BJP's marginal dip in 2024, the TMC has stepped up its campaign. Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee began her north Bengal push from Alipurduar and the adjoining tea belt, underlining the importance the party now attaches to the region.

The TMC is banking on women, minorities and beneficiaries of welfare schemes, while also trying to make inroads among tea garden workers and Rajbanshis. It has tied up with Anit Thapa's Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha in the hills, conceding Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong to the ally in a tactical move.

More significantly, both the BJP and the TMC believe the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls could alter the political arithmetic.

The revision has led to large-scale deletions – 2.42 lakh voters in Cooch Behar, 2.01 lakh in Jalpaiguri, 1.9 lakh in Darjeeling, 3.63 lakh in North Dinajpur, 4.59 lakh in Malda and 1.95 lakh in South Dinajpur. The BJP believes the deletions may help it by reducing what it calls inflated rolls in minority-dominated Malda and North Dinajpur. The TMC and Congress, however, allege that genuine voters, especially minorities and migrant workers, have been struck off.

The Congress, concentrating on Malda and the two Dinajpur districts, hopes the SIR controversy and minority consolidation will help it regain relevance.

The region's political geography remains sharply divided. The BJP dominated Cooch Behar, Alipurduar and Darjeeling in 2021 and edged past the TMC in Jalpaiguri.

The TMC retained the upper hand in minority-dominated North Dinajpur and Malda, while South Dinajpur was evenly split.

The BJP is facing resentment over ticket distribution and the induction of defectors, while the TMC, too, is battling factionalism in parts of Jalpaiguri and Rajganj.

If north Bengal once scripted the BJP's Bengal ascent, 23 April will show whether the story still has another chapter – or whether the TMC has finally found a way to rewrite it. —*PTI*

– WIKIPEDIA

US Labour Secy Lori Chavez-DeRemer leaves Cabinet

WASHINGTON, 21 APRIL

Labour Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer has left President Trump's Cabinet following allegations of abuse of power, including an affair with a subordinate and alcohol consumption at work. Her exit, announced by a White House aide, is the third recent Cabinet departure after Kristi Noem and Pam Bondi. White House spokesperson Steven Cheung praised her for protecting workers. The Labour Department's inspector general is reviewing reports that Chavez-DeRemer, her aides, and family members sent personal messages to young staff, with some instructed to "pay attention" to her family. She also faced accusations of drinking on duty and misusing her office for personal trips. Several officials, including her former chief of staff, have already been dis-

Gunman kills Canadian tourist at Mexican pyramid

MEXICO CITY, 21 APRIL

An armed man standing atop one of the historic Teotihuacan pyramids opened fire on tourists, killing one Canadian and leaving at least 13 people injured at the archaeological site north of Mexico's capital, authorities said. The shooter later died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, authorities said, and security officials found a gun, a knife and ammunition. The local government said seven people were wounded by gunshots on Monday. How the other people were injured was not disclosed, but those taken to hospitals for treatment were six Americans, three Colombians, one Russian, two Brazilians and one Canadian, the local government said. *–PTI*

Pak receives final $1B Saudi loan tranche

KARACHI, 21 APRIL

Pakistan has received the last $1 billion of a $3 billion aid package from Saudi Arabia, the State Bank confirmed. Last week, Saudi Arabia deposited $2 billion, completing the aid, which aims to bolster Pakistan's reserves now at $16.4 billion. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited Saudi Arabia to promote peace in West Asia. Riyadh's deposits now total $8 billion, making Saudi Arabia Pakistan's largest creditor. Pakistan repaid $2 billion to the UAE after failing to secure a rollover, and seeks a $1.2 billion IMF loan to stabilise reserves amid regional conflicts. The aid helps Pakistan meet its external pressures, with reserves covering approximately three months of imports. *–PTI*

– WIKIPEDIA

'D4vd' pleads not guilty to murder of 14-year-old girl

LOS ANGELES, 21 APR

Singer D4vd, real name David Burke, pleaded not guilty to charges of murder, lewd acts with a minor, and body mutilation in the death of 14-year-old Celeste Rivas Hernandez. The girl's body, found dismembered in Burke's Tesla, was last seen alive nearly a year ago. Authorities allege Burke killed her to prevent her from reporting their sexual relationship which allegedly laster for over a year. Burke, aged 21, appeared in court in black, held without bail. The charges include special circumstances, possibly carrying the death penalty. Police found the victim's limbs severed. Burke gained fame with TikTok hit 'Romantic Homicide'. *–PTI*

US takes over Iran tanker in Bay of Bengal

2nd tanker boarded as US tightens 'global' blockade of Iranian ports as ceasefire set to end

WASHINGTON, 21 APRIL

US forces have boarded an oil tanker sanctioned for smuggling Iranian crude oil in Asia, the Pentagon said Tuesday, as it puts into place a global warning to track down vessels tied to Tehran while enforcing a blockade.

US forces "conducted a right-of-visit maritime interdiction" and boarded the M/T Tifani "without incident," the Pentagon said on social media. However, the Pentagon on social media described the Tifani as "stateless" despite it being a Botswana-flagged vessel, raising questions about the credibility of its announcement.

"International waters are not a refuge for sanctioned vessels," the statement added.

The Tifani was captured in the Bay of Bengal — between India and Southeast Asia — and was carrying Iranian oil, according to a US defence official.

The US military will decide in the next four days what to do with the vessel, such as tow it back to the US or turn it over to another country, the official said.

It is the second vessel linked to Iran that has been interdicted by the US military.

The US Navy attacked and seized an Iranian-flagged cargo ship, Touska, on Sunday, with President Donald Trump saying an American destroyer blew a hole in the ship's engine room.

Tehran formally denounced the operation, describing it as a severe escalation in regional waters and said that the US must release the ship and its personnel.

China on Tuesday also denied any links to the ship seized in the Gulf.

WHY THE WAR MAY END UP AS A FROZEN CONFLICT

With the next round of diplomatic talks between Iran and the US uncertain, it appears as if the war is headed for a "frozen conflict". This means that the active combat has ended, but there is no peace treaty or other political framework that resolves the underlying issue.

1 Trump equates ceasefires with an end to war

Trump has claimed to ended ten wars, including Israel's invasion of Lebanon, when at best, he brokered or announced a ceasefire. Some of these 'ceasefires' have actually just been frozen conflicts – such as the Thailand-Cambodia and Israel-Gaza, where peace remains elusive.

2 Asymmetric wars are difficult to resolve

Iran admits that the US has a military advantage. However, Tehran has used asymmetric tactics such as closing the Strait of Hormuz. Asymmetric wars are often protracted as the weaker actor can't win a conventional battle, and tries to exhaust the stronger actor. The result? A frozen conflict.

3 No focus on the more complex issues

Neither the US nor Iran appears committed to any long-term resolution of the underlying tensions, including Iran' nuclear programme. Analysts believe the US and Iran could announce a partial agreement that would leave the technical aspects to be ironed out later.

SOURCE: THE CONVERSATION

"I think we're in a very strong negotiating position to do what other Presidents should've done... we had 47 years with these bloodthirsty people... We've taken out their navy, we've taken out their air force, we've taken out their leaders... (but) **Iran has violated the ceasefire multiple times**

—Donald Trump, US President

Trump, by imposing a blockade and violating the ceasefire, wants – in his own delusion – to turn the negotiating table into a table of surrender. We do not accept negotiations under the shadow of threats. Over the past two weeks, we have prepared ourselves to reveal new cards on the battlefield

—Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Iranian Parliament Speaker

The Ayatollah regime in Iran planned another Holocaust. It sought to destroy us with nuclear weapons and thousands of ballistic missiles. Had we not acted decisively, the names Natanz, Fordo, and Isfahan might have joined Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka... (But) together with our great ally, the US, we dismantled that machinery of destruction in advance

—Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister

Former US envoy to the UN Nikki Haley alleged that the ship contained chemical materials to manufacture missiles supplied by China to Iran.

The US' actions come as the two-week ceasefire with Iran is set to expire. Iran has closed the Strait of Hormuz, in an attempt to pressurise the US.

Pakistani officials have urged the US and Iran to extend their ceasefire deal, but there is no confirmation if talks will take place in Islamabad, despite Trump signalling that he may even attend. *—Agencies*

Iranian-backed Iraqi militants had attacked several US bases, including the Erbil Air Base, during the conflict *–SCREENGRAB*

Iran gives Iraqi militants more power

BAGHDAD, 21 APRIL

Iran has granted its commanders greater autonomy over militias in Iraq, allowing some groups to carry out operations without Tehran's approval, likely driven by pressures of the war, officials said.

There are several Iranian-backed militant groups that operate in Iraq, including the Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba. An alliance of pro-Iran Shiite factions, called the Coordination Framework, even helped Mohammed Shia al-Sudani as prime minister in 2022. He now serves as caretaker premier amid a prolonged political deadlock.

However, the US has sanctioned several of the paramilitary groups, and is now locked in a prolonged conflict with them, that is likely to extend beyond any agreement with Iran.

The most hard-line factions now operate under Iranian advisers using a decentralized command structure.

"The various forces have been granted the authority to operate according to their own field assessments without referring back to a central command," said one militia official. However, militant officials also say that there is "coordination" with Iran, but haven't provided details.

An Iranian delegation also visited Iraq's Kurdish region and said that they should not visit Tehran with complaints about militants' attacks as had been the tradition. *—PTI*

Israel bombs Lebanese towns and schools

BEIRUT, 21 APRIL

Israel continued to bomb Lebanon despite the 10-day ceasefire agreed upon last week.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said that Israel fired an artillery shells targeting the outskirts of the town of Qounine in the Bint Jbeil district, and that Israel bombed a school building in the southern town of Khiam on Tuesday. There was no comment from Israel and the extent of the damage was not immediately clear.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had instructed the military to continue operating "with full force, on land and in the air," including during the ceasefire in the case of threats.

Katz said that the campaign allegedly seeking the disarmament of Hezbollah will continue "through a combination of military and diplomatic measures."

These developments come as the second round of peace talks between Lebanon and Israel are scheduled to be held in the US on Thursday. The first round of talks helped broker the 10-day ceasefire, as nearly 2,100 people have been killed in Lebanon and a million displaced. *—AGENCIES*

A man mourns over the coffin of a Hezbollah fighter who was killed by Israel, during a mass funeral in Bazouriyeh, Lebanon, on Monday *–PTI*

'Fertiliser, gas disruptions may last into 2027'

Disruptions to fertiliser and natural gas supplies could extend into 2027— only if hostilities end and work to restore global trade flows can begin, warned Arsenio Dominguez, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organisation. He said countries standing up for freedom the Strait of Hormuz are sending "the right message".

10 yrs after civil war, Iraq-Syria crossing reopens

A key border crossing between Iraq and Syria — known as Rabia in Bagdad and Yarubiyah in Damascus—reopened on Monday for the first time since the Syrian civil war in 2011, with officials highlighting its potential for trade and oil exports. Syria touted the crossing as a safe overland route alternative to the Strait of Hormuz.

Israel strikes & settlers kill 7 in Gaza, West Bank

Israeli strikes killed at least five Palestinians in separate incidents in the Gaza Strip on Monday, Palestinian health officials said as clashes were reported Hamas fighters clashed with gunmen from an Israeli-backed militia, witnesses said. Meanwhile, settlers killed two people, including a teenager in the West Bank.

KP Assembly seeks Nobel for Sharif, Munir

A resolution recommending Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir for the Nobel Peace Prize for their role in easing regional tensions through diplomacy was submitted in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly on Tuesday. A similar resolution was adopted by the Punjab Assembly on 16 April.

Critics dub Palantir's manifesto 'technofascism'

TOKYO, 21 APRIL

The US tech giant Palantir Technologies' new manifesto has drawn flak by experts and lawmakers across the globe, who have described it as "technofacism" and "the ramblings of a supervillain".

"Some cultures have produced vital advances; others remain dysfunctional and regressive," wrote Palantir in a 22-point post on X over the weekend, which also called for an end to the "postwar neutering" of Germany and Japan.

The manifesto says it is "moral" for tech companies to invest in defence and that hard power is necessary for democracy.

However, the manifesto from one of the most powerful tech companies drew pushback.

"If you're looking for an example of technofascism: this is it," said philosopher Mark Coeckelbergh on X.

Martin Wrigley, a Liberal Democrat MP said that this showed that Palantir's "ethos is entirely unsuited to working on UK government projects involving citizens' most sensitive private data". Palantir, has built up £500m in contracts in Britain, including a £330m contract with the NHS. *—Agencies*

JAPAN ENDS BAN ON LETHAL WEAPONS EXPORTS

TOKYO, 21 APRIL

Japan has lifted its longstanding ban on exports of lethal weapons, marking a significant shift from its postwar pacifist stance. The decision, approved by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Cabinet, aims to bolster Japan's arms industry amidst concerns over Chinese and North Korean threats. The new guidelines allow exports of fighter jets, missiles, and destroyers, expanding beyond current non-lethal supplies like gas masks and civilian vehicles sent to Ukraine.

Initially limited to 17 countries with defence agreements, exports now require approval from the National Security Council, with ongoing government monitoring. Japan remains committed to strict export controls, excluding countries at war, but exceptions may be made. The move follows a 2023 revision permitting sales of US-designed Patriot missiles and collaborative development of a sixth-generation fighter jet.

Countries like Australia and New Zealand have already expressed interest in Japanese defence equipment. *—PTI*

PRE-IPO SCAM

BTS agency founder faces arrest in fraud case

SEOUL, 21 APRIL

South Korea police said Tuesday they were seeking to arrest music mogul Bang Si-Hyuk, chairman of the agency behind K-pop supergroup BTS in a multi-million-dollar investor fraud scam.

(Inset) Music mogul Bang Si-Hyuk founded HYBE, which manages K-pop boyband BTS—*WEVERSE/ BIG HIT*

The move comes as the police expanded its investigation into allegations that Bang illegally gained more than $100 million in an investor fraud scheme.

The Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency confirmed that it has asked prosecutors to request a court warrant for Bang's arrest. Representatives of Bang's agency, HYBE, did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Bang has been under investigation since November over allegations that he misled investors in 2019 by telling them HYBE had no plans to go public, inducing them to sell their shares to a private equity fund before the company proceeded with an initial public offering. Police believe that the fund may have paid Bang around 200 billion won ($136 million) in a side deal that promised him 30 per cent of post-IPO stock sale profits.

Bang, a music executive and producer who founded HYBE as Big Hit Entertainment in 2005, is widely seen as one of the most powerful figures in K-pop, overseeing some of the industry's most popular acts, including Seventeen, Le Sserafim and Katseye in addition to BTS.

Bang's legal troubles are a major public relations setback for HYBE, as BTS embarks on a global tour after a nearly four-year hiatus. *—PTI*

— PTI

Rupee plunges 32P to settle at 93.48 against USD

MUMBAI, 21 APRIL

The rupee declined 32 paise to close at 93.48 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, weighed down by a firm American currency and volatile crude oil prices amid uncertainty over West Asia peace talks. Positive domestic equities failed to support the currency, which was also pressured by the Reserve Bank's move to ease curbs on speculative bets in non-deliverable forward (NDF) markets. The central bank partially rolled back April 1 restrictions but retained the USD 100 million cap on net open positions. The rupee opened at 93.25, hit a low of 93.63, and settled weaker. The dollar index rose 0.19 per cent to 98.09, while Brent crude fell 0.70 per cent to USD 94.81 per barrel. —*PTI*

— PTI

Bullion silver prices rise amid West Asia tensions

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Silver prices increased Rs 700 to Rs 2.58 lakh per kg in Delhi on Tuesday, while gold also edged higher amid geopolitical tensions and mixed global cues. The All India Sarafa Association reported gold of 99.9 per cent purity gained Rs 300 to Rs 1,57,300 per 10g, including taxes. Gaurav Garg from Lemonn Markets said, "Geopolitical tensions in the West Asia are prompting investors to seek safe-haven assets." Meanwhile, global spot silver fell 1.29 per cent to USD 78.69 per ounce, and gold declined nearly 1 per cent to USD 4,776.85. Praveen Singh from Mirae Asset said, "Gold's direction will depend on developments in West Asia and their impact on energy costs and inflation." —*PTI*

FSSAI orders use of only Ashwagandha roots, extracts

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has directed food manufacturers to use Ashwagandha roots and their extracts, not the leaves. Although Ashwagandha is permitted in health supplements, nutraceuticals, and medical foods, some manufacturers have been using leaves and their extracts, which is now prohibited. The Ayush Ministry has also instructed drug and product makers to restrict usage to roots and extracts. Food safety officials have been asked to ensure strict compliance with these provisions to prevent violations. —*PTI*

Hindustan Copper plans Rs 7,189 cr expansion in 5 yrs

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Hindustan Copper Ltd (HCL) has announced a capital expenditure of Rs 7,188.90 crore over five years for mine expansion. The company will spend Rs 450.51 crore this year, followed by Rs 1,421.73 crore in 2027 and Rs 1,993.70 crore in 2028. It plans to increase ore production from 4.21 million tonnes in 2025-26 to 12.20 MTPA by 2029-30, as outlined in its Vision 2030 roadmap. HCL expects profit after tax to rise from Rs 589 crore in 2026 to Rs 1,568 crore by 2030, with dividend payouts increasing accordingly. The company launched its IT Vision Document 2026–2030, focusing on digital transformation, safety, and efficiency, including private 5G, AI, and ML integration. —*PTI*

Apple taps hardware chief John Ternus as CEO

Challenges such as supply chain strains, AI race await him

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Apple Inc. has announced a major leadership transition, with Chief Executive Officer Tim Cook set to step down and hand over the reins to long-time hardware chief John Ternus.

Ternus, currently Senior Vice President of Hardware Engineering, will assume the role of CEO from 1 September, 2026, while Cook will transition to executive chairman of the board. The change comes at a time when Apple faces a critical phase, balancing geopolitical supply chain challenges with the need to drive the next wave of growth in an increasingly artificial intelligence-driven landscape. Rivals such as Google, Microsoft and Meta are making aggressive bets in this space.

Having spent nearly his entire career at Apple, Ternus is regarded as a key insider with deep product expertise and a reputation for steady execution. He joined the company's product design team in 2001, became Vice President of Hardware Engineering in 2013, and joined the executive team in 2021.

While Tim Cook will transition to executive chairman of the board, John Ternus will take on as CEO from 1 September, 2026 —*APPLE.COM*

Over the years, he has overseen engineering across major product lines, contributing to the introduction of new categories such as iPad and AirPods, while advancing core offerings including iPhone, Mac and Apple Watch. His work on Mac has been credited with driving a resurgence in the category, enhancing both performance and global appeal.

Most recently, Ternus led teams behind a revamped iPhone lineup, including the high-performance iPhone 17 Pro and Pro Max, the ultra-thin iPhone Air, and the upgraded iPhone 17.

He has also overseen improvements in AirPods, particularly in active noise cancellation, alongside advances in durability, materials innovation and sustainability.

His initiatives include the use of recycled aluminium compounds, 3D-printed titanium in Apple Watch Ultra 3, and enhanced repairability to extend product lifecycles.

"I am filled with optimism about what we can achieve," Ternus said, noting it was a privilege to have worked under Steve Jobs and alongside Cook.

He holds a mechanical engineering degree from University of Pennsylvania and has worked at Virtual Research Systems. —*PTI*

Any recovery, therefore, will depend entirely on commercial negotiations between exporters and their US counterparts — *PTI*

US refunds tariffs, exporters eye share

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

The United States has begun refunding reciprocal tariffs from 20 April, prompting Indian exporters to actively engage with American buyers to secure a share of the returned duties, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said on Tuesday.

The think tank noted that refunds will be issued only to US importers, leaving Indian exporters with no direct legal right to claim them. Any recovery, therefore, will depend entirely on commercial negotiations between exporters and their US counterparts.

The tariffs, imposed from 2 April, 2025, affected a wide range of Indian exports. GTRI estimates total refunds at around USD 166 billion, of which nearly USD 12 billion is linked to Indian goods.

To claim refunds, US importers must file detailed applications online, including shipment data, tariff classifications and proof of duty payments.

The reciprocal tariff regime began at 10 per cent on 2 April, 2025, rising to 25 per cent by 7 August and further to 50 per cent by 28 August, remaining at that level until early February 2026. On February 20, the US Supreme Court struck down the tariff framework, rendering it legally void and triggering the refund process.

Around 53 per cent of India's exports to the US, particularly textiles and apparel, were impacted. Of the USD 12 billion linked to India, textiles and apparel may account for USD 4 billion, engineering goods another USD 4 billion, and chemicals about USD 2 billion. —*PTI*

Markets climb 1% amid hopes of Iran-US peace talks

MUMBAI, 21 APRIL

Stock markets advanced for the third straight session on Tuesday, with the Sensex surging 753 points and the Nifty closing above 24,550, supported by easing crude oil prices and optimism over progress in Iran-US peace talks.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 753.03 points, or 0.96 per cent, to settle at 79,273.33. During the day, it rallied 846.78 points, or 1.07 per cent, to 79,367.08. The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 211.75 points, or 0.87 per cent, to end at 24,576.60.

Among Sensex constituents, Trent was the top gainer, rising 3.55 per cent. Hindustan Unilever, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank were also major winners. On the other hand, Bharat Electronics, Titan, Reliance Industries and NTPC were among the laggards.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.75 per cent to USD 94.76 per barrel. Broader markets also gained, with the BSE MidCap Select index rising 0.73 per cent and the SmallCap Select index up 0.29 per cent.

Sectorally, FMCG led the rally with a 2.23 per cent gain, followed by Realty (2.17 per cent), MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt (1.71 per cent), Private Banks (1.67 per cent), Top 10 Banks (1.66 per cent) and Bankex (1.46 per cent), while Capital Goods was the only laggard. —*PTI*

Adani Power forms step-down arm for nuclear energy space

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Adani Power on Tuesday said it has incorporated a step-down subsidiary, which will be engaged in generation, transmission, and distribution of electricity derived from nuclear sources.

The government aims to reach 100 GW of nuclear energy capacity by 2047 and has made several legislative changes to encourage private players' participation in the sector.

In an exchange filing on Monday, Adani Power said its wholly-owned subsidiary Adani Atomic Energy Ltd has incorporated a wholly-owned subsidiary Rawatbhata-Raj Atomic Energy Limited on 20 April, 2026. The entity will generate, transmit, and distribute power derived from nuclear and/or atomic energy.

India's nuclear energy capacity stands in the range of 8-9 GW. Tata Power and Naveen Jindal Group, have announced plans to invest in the nuclear space. —*PTI*

INDIA'S ECONOMY EXPECTED TO GROW AT 6.4% IN 2026: UN

UNITED NATIONS, 21 APRIL

India's economy is forecast to expand by 6.4 per cent this year and 6.6 per cent in 2027, according to a UN report. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) noted that South and South-West Asian economies grew by 5.4 per cent in 2025, up from 5.2 per cent in 2024, largely driven by India's strong growth.

India's growth increased to 7.4 per cent in 2025, supported by robust rural consumption, goods and services tax cuts, and export pre-emptive measures ahead of US tariffs. The report states that in India, economic activity slowed in late 2025 as exports to the US declined by 25 per cent following tariffs. The services sector drove growth.

Inflation is projected at 4.4 per cent, dropping to 4.3 per cent in 2027. FDI fell by 2 per cent in 2025. India attracted USD 50 billion in greenfield investments, the highest in the region. Personal remittances, worth USD 137 billion in 2024, continue to support household consumption but face challenges. —*PTI*

'HIGH FOREIGN OWNERSHIP +VE FOR INDIA'

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Fitch Ratings on Tuesday said significant ownership by foreign shareholders can be positive for Indian financial institutions' credit profiles through long-term capital, as well as lifting of governance standards in some cases.

Transactions that strengthen internal controls, risk management and leadership accountability can be more credit-relevant than those purely for financial gains, it noted.

Fitch said greater interest from foreign investors indicates their rising confidence in India's long-term growth prospects, financial sector's regulations and oversight, and improved risk governance.

Fitch believes investors will seek platforms with scalable distribution and local expertise. "Acquirors with experience in developed markets may introduce enhancements in risk controls and board oversight," it said, adding that the presence of reputable strategic shareholders can potentially ease its cost of capital. —*PTI*

BIOCON GETS NOC FOR 2 BIOSIMILARS

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Biocon Ltd on Tuesday said it has received a notice of compliance from Health Canada for its biosimilars Bosaya and Vevzuo, indicated for the treatment of osteoporosis and bone complications associated with cancer.

Health Canada has granted a notice of compliance (NOC) for Bosaya (denosumab), a biosimilar to Prolia, and Vevzuo (denosumab), a biosimilar to Xgeva, on 3 April, 2026, Biocon Ltd said in a regulatory filing.

"Both biosimilars were approved in the most common presentations -- Bosaya, as a 60 mg/ml injection for subcutaneous use in a prefilled syringe; and Vevzuo, as a 120 mg/1.7 ml (70 mg/ml) injection for subcutaneous use in a single-dose vial," it said.—*PTI*

HPCL sees no material impact from refinery fire

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

A four-member team constituted by India's oil ministry is in Rajasthan to investigate a fire at a refinery, even as HPCL said the incident is not expected to have a material financial or operational impact, and that all units are structurally safe with no effect on other sections

Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) on Tuesday said a fire at its Rajasthan refinery is not expected to have any material financial or operational impact, adding that all units remain structurally safe.

The blaze broke out on 20 April in the crude distillation unit, likely due to a hydrocarbon leak from a valve or flange in a heat exchanger circuit, the company said in a stock exchange filing.

It was confined to the heat exchanger stack and quickly brought under control by the site's emergency response team. No casualties or injuries were reported.

Firefighters douse a blaze after a fire broke out at the HPCL Pachpadra Refinery, in Balotra, Rajasthan, on Monday —*PTI*

As a precaution, the crude distillation unit, vacuum distillation unit and associated sections were isolated. HPCL said no other part of the refinery was affected. An investigation by internal and external experts is under way to determine the cause and recommend remedial measures.

Rajasthan Chief Secretary V Srinivas held discussions with HPCL's chairman on Tuesday regarding the incident.

A scheduled 21 April dedication of the refinery by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been postponed, with a revised date to be announced.

The Rs 79,450-crore refinery-cum-petrochemical complex in Balotra district, designed as a 9 million tonnes per annum facility, is slated to begin commercial operations from 1 July. It has a Nelson Complexity Index of 17 and petrochemical yields exceeding 26 per cent.

- The blaze broke out on 20 April in the crude distillation unit, likely due to a hydrocarbon leak from a valve or flange in a heat exchanger circuit, the company said in a stock exchange filing

Refineries are particularly vulnerable to fires during commissioning.

The HPCL-led joint venture, with a 74 per cent stake, will produce fuels and petrochemicals including polypropylene, polyethylene, benzene and butadiene. —*PTI*

IN BENGALURU

FedEx makes 1st intra-city drone delivery

MUMBAI, 21 APRIL

Express transportation firm Federal Express Corporation (FedEx) on Tuesday said it has completed India's first intra-city drone delivery flight trials in Bengaluru in collaboration with IIT-Madras.

The trials were conducted under the research framework of the FedEx SMART Centre at IIT Madras, FedEx said in a statement.

The centre established that a 53-km road journey, which typically takes over 60 minutes, can be replaced by an aerial route of 39-42 km.

During the trials, this reduced one-way transit time to nearly 21 minutes - demonstrating the potential for step-change improvements in time-critical logistics, it said.

The flight path involved coordinated navigation through Airport Yellow and Red Zones, with all necessary permissions granted by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation.

A 53-km road journey, which typically takes over 60 minutes, can be replaced by an aerial route of 39-42 km —*ANI*

"This milestone reflects the FedEx SMART Centre's broader research agenda across air cargo optimisation, electric vehicle integration, and advanced demand forecasting," said Nitin Navneet Tatiwala, vice president of marketing, customer experience, and air network for Middle East, Indian Subcontinent, and Africa (MEISA) at FedEx

Together, these efforts are focused on shaping future-ready, resilient and sustainable supply chain ecosystems in partnership with academia, industry and policymakers, he added. —*PTI*

India should aim at 100 pc ethanol blending: Gadkari

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday said India should aspire to achieve 100 per cent ethanol blending in the near future, as vulnerabilities in oil exports amid the West Asia crisis have made it necessary for the country to become self-reliant in energy sector.

Gadkari said the Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency III standards, which will be implemented from next April, will have little impact on electric and flex-fuel vehicles.

"India should aspire to achieve 100 per cent ethanol blending... Today, we are facing an energy crisis due to the war," he said, while addressing the Indian Federation of Green Energy's Green Transport Conclave.

In 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched petrol blended with 20 per cent ethanol. Currently, Indian vehicles can run on E20 petrol with minor changes to the engine to prevent corrosion.

Countries like Brazil have 100 per cent ethanol blending. Gadkari said India relies on imports to meet 87 per cent of its oil requirement.

"We import fossil fuels worth Rs 22 lakh crore, which is also causing pollution... so we need to work on increasing production of alternative fuel and bio-fuel," he said. – *PTI*

Sony wins 2026 Asian Games broadcast rights

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Sony Pictures Networks India has secured exclusive rights to broadcast the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Japan, from 19 September to 4 October. The event will be shown on Sony Sports Network channels and streamed on Sony LIV across India and the subcontinent. India enters the Games following a historic success in the previous edition, where it achieved a record 107 medals. Rajesh Kaul, Chief Revenue Officer and Business Head – Sports and International, SPNI, said, "We are proud to bring this continental multi-sport event back to Sony Pictures Networks for the third time." The Asian Games will feature 41 disciplines, including 32 Olympic sports, with new additions like mixed martial arts and surfing besides cricket, tennis, esports, kabaddi. —*PTI*

—BCCI

Shafali Verma rises to sixth spot in ICC Rankings

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Indian opener Shafali Verma has climbed two spots to sixth in the ICC Women's T20I Batting Rankings after her 57 off 38 balls against South Africa in the ongoing series. Despite her half-century in Durban, India lost the second T20I by eight wickets, slipping to 0-2. She also scored 34 in the first match. Vice-captain Smriti Mandhana has dropped one place to fourth after scores of 13 and 12, overtaken by Hayley Matthews of West Indies. Captain Harmanpreet Kaur has risen two spots to 11th, with an unbeaten 47 in the first match. Jemimah Rodrigues has fallen four spots to 14th. South Africa's Laura Wolvaardt remains fifth. Indian bowlers Deepti Sharma, Renuka Singh Thakur, and Arundhati Reddy have also slipped rankings. —*PTI*

Gheorghe Hagi returns as Romania's Coach

BUCHAREST, 21 APRIL

Gheorghe Hagi, Romania's legendary footballer, has been appointed as the national team's coach for the second time, replacing Mircea Lucescu who died two weeks ago. The 61-year-old, widely regarded as Romania's greatest player, led Romania to the 1994 World Cup quarter-finals and played for Barcelona and Real Madrid. His first coaching term in 2001 lasted three months. Hagi said, "It is an honour and a great responsibility to represent Romania once again, as I did as a player." His first matches will be friendlies against Georgia and Wales in June. The team, ranked 56th, aims for the 2030 World Cup, with a contract until then. Romania's last participation was in 1998, and they reached the 2024 European Championship round of 16.—*PTI*

RR worried about Parag's poor form

Inaugural champions began with four straight wins but have since lost two on the trot

LUCKNOW, 21 APRIL

Rajasthan Royals will be wary of their faltering middle order, particularly skipper Riyan Parag's poor form, as they look to arrest a slide against a struggling Lucknow Super Giants in their IPL clash on Wednesday.

Placed third, the inaugural champions began with four straight wins but have since lost two on the trot. A 57-run defeat to Sunrisers Hyderabad exposed their fragility, with RR collapsing by losing five wickets for nine runs against pace. In their previous outing, they squandered a strong position against Kolkata Knight Riders, where Rinku Singh orchestrated a dramatic turnaround.

Despite their issues, RR appear stronger than LSG, who sit ninth after three consecutive defeats —*X/LSG*

Parag, a surprise captaincy choice after Sanju Samson's exit, has endured a lean run, managing three single-digit scores in six innings, with a highest of 20. While the top order — Yashasvi Jaiswal, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and Dhruv Jurel — has carried the batting, the side has struggled when they fail. Veteran Ravindra Jadeja has looked below par, and Shimron Hetmyer (39 runs in four innings) is yet to fire. Batting coach Vikram Rathour, however, remains confident Parag will return to form.

Fielding lapses have also hurt RR, with Nandre Burger's dropped catch of Rinku proving costly.

Despite their issues, RR appear stronger than LSG, who sit ninth after three consecutive defeats. RR's opening pair has been among the most effective this season, putting pressure on LSG's misfiring bowling attack. Punjab Kings recently piled up 254/7 — the season's highest — against them, with Priyansh Arya and Cooper Connolly adding 182 runs in 13.2 overs. Prince Yadav has been a rare bright spot, while Avesh Khan, Mohammed Shami and Manimaran Siddharth have struggled.

LSG will look to exploit RR's middle-order woes. But but their own batting remainsunsettled. —*PTI*

CSK star Mhatre's injury knocks him out of IPL

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Chennai Super Kings batter Ayush Mhatre has been ruled out of the remainder of the ongoing IPL season due to a hamstring injury, dealing a major blow to the five-time champions.

The franchise said Mhatre, who sustained the injury during CSK's game against Sunrisers Hyderabad on 18 April, will require a rehabilitation period of six to 12 weeks.

The 18-year-old, who came in as an impact substitute, was seen in visible discomfort and clutched his hamstring while attempting a run during CSK's 10-run loss to SRH in Hyderabad.

He required on-field treatment but was dismissed soon after.

"It looks pretty bad, unfortunately. And he's going to be a big, big loss because he's been in really nice touch for us," CSK's batting coach Mike Hussey said.

Ayush Mhatre has been CSK's standout batter this season. He collected 201 runs from six matches at a strike-rate of 177.87. —*PTI*

99-run loss is unacceptable: Hayden blames batting

AHMEDABAD, 21 APRIL

Gujarat Titans' batting coach Matthew Hayden was scathing about their 99-run defeat to Mumbai Indians, blaming a "horror" batting display and poor death bowling for the heavy loss in the IPL.

From being 44/3 in 5.5 overs, MI hammered 73 runs in the last four overs to post a challenging 199/5 here on Monday. GT were bundled out for 100. The legendary Australian opener termed the margin "unacceptable", saying, "There was nothing good about this day apart from Rabada's performance with the ball."

Despite a strong batting line-up featuring Sai Sudharsan (759 runs), Shubman Gill (717), Jos Buttler (538), Glenn Phillips, Shahrukh Khan and Rahul Tewatia, Hayden said the middle order was exposed too early.

"You can't be sitting here and being happy about, a 100-run (99) margin game in a 20-over game. I mean, back in my day, 100 runs was almost a winning total in 50-over cricket!"

Hayden said GT has an aggressive and adaptable unit but their execution fell apart on the day. He likened the innings to a "sinking boat".

Hayden also pointed to poor execution in the death overs. "When you look back at those last four overs, that was just a 'horror story' - 73 off the last four is unacceptable as world-class players."

He credited Tilak Verma for the dominant knock and added that while the chase was achievable, poor shot selection proved costly.—*PTI*

- GT were bundled out for 100. The legendary Australian opener termed the margin "unacceptable", saying, "There was nothing good about this day apart from Rabada's performance with the ball."

Gill, Bumrah may be rested for one-off Afghanistan Test

MUMBAI, 21 APRIL

Indian selectors are likely to rest top stars Shubman Gill and Jasprit Bumrah for the One-Off Afghanistan Test match slated to begin 6 June.

Sources said the move is likely in view of the tight turn around after the IPL 2026 final which will end on 31 May. The plays will have six days before the test match against Afghanistan begins.

Top players like Shubman Gill and Jasprit Bumrah may be given a break, as the Test does not count towards the ongoing ICC World Test Championship (WTC) cycle. However, the two players could be included in the team that will play three ODI matches, soon after.

Sources explained that there would not be much breathing space for players between the IPL final and the Afghanistan Test.

The selectors and the team management have to consider the burning out of the players and take a call accordingly.

- The selectors and the team management have to consider the burning out of the players and take a call accordingly. They would have also to contend with the three ODIs followed by the white-ball series in England, sources said

They would have also to contend with the three ODIs followed by the white-ball series in England, sources added.

As soon as the IPL season ends the selectors focus will revert to the WTC and the next year's ODI World Cup. Given the scenario, it is very unlikely that the selectors would risk burning out top players like Bumrah for a not so important one-off Test against Afghanistan, sources further pointed out.

Sources said for Indian team selectors and management the need of the hour is to keep the best players fit and fine for the coming four tests, two each against Sri Lanka and New Zealand followed by other ODIs. —*Agencies*

PCB, Saudi discuss Jeddah cricket stadium

LAHORE, 21 APRIL

The Pakistan Cricket Board is in talks with the Saudi Arabia Cricket Federation to build a stadium in Jeddah, a proposal that has already received approval from the PCB's Governing Board.

Sources within the PCB revealed that chairman Mohsin Naqvi is leading discussions with Saudi cricket officials, and an expression of interest for the stadium's construction has already been submitted.

"The PCB wants to promote cricket in the Saudi Kingdom and also hold some Pakistan Super League matches there, but a final document is yet to be signed for starting work on the new stadium," the source said.

He added that discussions are underway to identify a suitable site for the stadium, which will feature floodlights and a seating capacity sufficient for top-level matches, including the potential to host PSL games.

The source added that Saudi cricket officials had approached the PCB for the project, noting that the oil-rich kingdom has recently shown a growing interest in promoting cricket and has even explored the possibility of launching its own T20 league.

"Talks are in the initial stages but PCB has made it clear it is on board with the Saudi body because of the brotherly ties between the two countries," the source added.

"The PCB has shown interest because of the presence of a large Pakistani and other South Asian expatriate community in the kingdom," the source added. —*PTI*

HC holds Hockey India secretary general guilty of contempt

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

The Delhi High Court has held Hockey India secretary general Bhola Nath Singh guilty of contempt of court for wilfully disobeying its order. Justice Purushaindra Kumar Kaurav said he would consider the sentence on 4 May but granted Singh liberty to "purge" the contempt by undertaking "such measures as found fit."

The judgement was passed on 20 April following a contempt plea by Syeed Asima Ali, the elected Vice President of Hockey India, who alleged non-compliance with a 17 January 2025, court order by the sports body's officials. The court noted that Hockey India officials were directed to provide links to Ali for her to participate in all executive board meetings but failed to do so for meetings on 4 July and 27 July, 2025.

The court observed that subsequent events did not absolve officials from their obligation to provide links when no modification was sought. It stated, It held that Hockey India and Singh's conduct amounted to clear contempt. —*PTI*

VIOLATING ANTI-DOPING RULES

Archer Jawkar accepts 2-year ban for whereabouts failures

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Prathamesh Jawkar, a gold medallist at the Asian Games 2023, has accepted a two-year suspension for violating anti-doping whereabouts rules, ruling him out of international competitions until April 2028.

According to Olympics.com, the 22-year-old compound archer agreed to the sanction imposed by the International Testing Agency, with the ban coming into effect from 19 April. He will miss the upcoming Asian Games and is likely out of Olympic Games 2028.

Jawkar's suspension stems from three whereabouts filing failures in 12 months, recorded in January, July and October last year, a violation under Article 2.4 of anti-doping regulations.

Athletes in the Registered Testing Pool must update their location on the Anti-Doping Administration and Management System to remain available for testing.

Jawkar's suspension for violating anti-doping whereabouts rules entailed he must update location and be available for testing —*PTI*

Jawkar admitted the lapses were due to "sheer negligence", citing missed deadlines, including turning off phone notifications and uncertainty around travel plans during an overseas trip.

Jawkar, however, said, "I will not stop practising, and I will not lose hope."

Jawkar was part of India's gold medal-winning compound men's team at Hangzhou Asian Games with Ojas Pravin Deotale and Abhishek Verma. He clinched gold at a World Cup stage in Shanghai. —*ANI*

IMPACT OF WEST ASIA WAR

Iran unsure of FIFA WC 2026 participation

TEHRAN, 21 APRIL

Iran's participation in the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2026 remains uncertain, with the country's Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali confirming that a final decision will depend on evolving security and political conditions in the ongoing tensions between US and Iran.

Donyamali told mediapersons on Tuesday, "We had a discussion about the national team itself, the conditions of the national team, and we also formed a committee. Today we also have a meeting in the framework of this discussion, and we are fulfilling our legal duty.

We must be prepared. In any case, it might be decided not to go. And if it is decided to go, we should be prepared anyway."

Iran has qualified for the expanded 48-team tournament and is placed in Group G alongside Belgium, New Zealand, and Egypt —*X/IRANFB*

The tournament is set to be co-hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico from 11 June to 19 July.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino has reiterated that Iran remains part of the competition. Infantino recently met the Iranian squad in Turkey and praised their determination to compete.

Iran has qualified for the expanded 48-team tournament and is placed in Group G, alongside Belgium, New Zealand, and Egypt. Their matches are slated to be held in Los Angeles and Seattle.

However, geopolitical tensions have cast doubt over their participation on US soil. US President Donald Trump expressed reservations about the team's safety.

The 2026 edition of the FIFA World Cup football will be the largest in history, featuring 48 teams and 104 matches. The opening game is scheduled in Mexico City and the final match of the tournament will be held in New Jersey. —*ANI*

Alcaraz, Sabalenka win Laureus Award of the year

MADRID, 21 APRIL

Tennis stars Carlos Alcaraz and Aryna Sabalenka were crowned sportsman and sportswoman of the year at the Laureus Awards in Madrid. Paris Saint-Germain was named team of the year. Alcaraz, who secured last year's French, US., and Australian Opens, attended with his right wrist immobilised. He withdrew from the Madrid Open last week. "We'll see," he said when asked if he will compete at the French Open.

The upcoming medical tests will be crucial, he explained, "We've been trying to do everything we can to make sure that this test goes well. I'm trying to be very patient. But we are good, we are just waiting a little bit. We have a few tests in the next few days and then we will see how the injury is, and what the next steps will be." The 22-year-old, who was awarded Laureus' world sportsman of the year, added, "For now, I've been trying to stay positive, to stay upbeat, even though these days have become a bit too long."

Alcaraz withdrew from Barcelona after wrist treatment and won the Italian Open next, last year. —*PTI*

Alcaraz, Sabalenka pose with Laureus World Sportsman of the Year award in Madrid —*PTI*